

*A Golden Age?: An interdisciplinary investigation into
the funding rationale, access policies and the pursuit of
artistic excellence by Arts Council England under the
New Labour Government, 1996/97-2007/08*

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Joe Mcloughlin, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: J.Mcloughlin

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
Outlining the Historical Context and The Development of UK Cultural Policy 1979-2015	17
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
Neoliberalism, New Labour and the Misunderstood Funding Rationale of Arts Council England	34
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
The Problems of New Labour, a Paucivorous Public and the Value of a Processual Access Policy	89
<i>Chapter 4</i>	
The Complexity of Excellence: <i>Supporting Excellence</i> , Kantian Aesthetics and the Challenges of the Policy Process	135
<i>Conclusion</i>	178
<i>Bibliography</i>	183
<i>Appendix</i>	
<i>Interview with Daniel Brine, Artistic Director, Cambridge Junction</i>	205
<i>Interview with Stephen Johnstone, Artistic Director, Black Country Touring</i>	215
<i>Interview with David Micklem, Arts Council England Senior Theatre Strategy Officer (2001-2007)</i>	232
<i>Interview with Jon Spooner, Artistic Director, Unlimited Theatre</i>	242
<i>Interview with Mark Hollander, Arts Council England Theatre Officer, Acting Director of Performing Arts and Senior Manager of Funding Programmes (2001-2013)</i>	259

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Introduction

Provocation, Purpose & Parameters

Speaking at the Tate Modern in March 2007, Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested that the last ten years represented a 'Golden Age' for the arts in Britain. This phrase has been singled out by a number of writers since and used by some as a prompt for critical reflection. Writing in *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*, Robert Hewison opined that 'golden ages are rarely what they seem' before drawing out and evaluating some of the complexities submerged by this idealistic phrase.¹ This comment from Hewison offers a concise but resonant description of the provocation that drives this thesis. Simply, that despite the opening of myriad income streams, record investment, the saving of regional theatre, the apparent growth in attendance rates and a series of headline cultural successes (including the opening of the Tate Modern in which Blair was speaking) not everything in the British cultural sector was golden after a decade of New Labour governance.

Focusing particularly on the work of Arts Council England, 'the national body for the arts', there were a number of complications that challenged such a positive reading.² These included, but were not limited to, the common perception that the funding rationale of Art Council England had been overwhelmed by a hard-line neoliberal logic, questions over the efficacy of Arts Council England's attempts to make the arts accessible to priority groups (including black and minority ethnic, disabled and the socially excluded) but also more people generally, and the worry over an excessively instrumental policy bent that had potentially seen the dismissal of excellence as an organisational concern by 2007. Acknowledging these complications, this thesis will explore this decade, 1996/07-2007/08, in more detail. The aims of this exploration are twofold. In relation to the established thinking on the subject, as articulated by authors in disciplines as varied as cultural history, cultural policy and public management, cultural economics and theatre and performance studies, this thesis will provide new assessments of the relationship between Arts Council policies and their impact in practice. Specifically, the forthcoming chapters will examine the funding rationale of the organisation and explore why and with what aim money was given. They will interrogate the efficacy of Arts Council policies to improve access and scrutinise in detail what were identified in a range of research materials as barriers to access and how these might be overcome. They will consider what position the concern for aesthetic quality held in the policy formulation process and suggest that, regardless of the emphasis given to its significance, it will always be framed by certain instrumental interests.

¹ Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*, (London: Verso, 2014), p. 3

² Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2003*, (London: ACE, 2003), p. 1

The scrutiny of these issues will generate new and more accurate characterisations of the various policy approaches of Arts Council England and their impacts in practice during this period. This thesis will thus enhance understandings of the organisation and thereby moves the critical conversation on the subject forward in new and sometimes different directions. Using some of the ideas developed in this work as a foundation, the second aim of the thesis is to provide some prompts for the formulation of more assured and effective policy in the future. In doing so, this work will serve a broader purpose with the ideas on offer not only showcasing theoretical developments within the academic field but also having the potential to contribute to practical change in the wider arts sector. To be clear, whilst it is an overstatement to say that by 2007/08 Arts Council policy was broken and needed fixing, I think that it is fair to say that the development of studied, theoretically rigorous alternative approaches that have been scrutinised and tested through primary research and the construction of prototype case studies has the potential for positive practical impact and this should not be ignored.

I have selected to study this decade for several reasons. In addition to being identified by Tony Blair as a point of reflection on what New Labour had attempted, achieved and the consequences of ten years of their policy, this point in time also represents the final moments before a period of significant change in the global context, national governance and Arts Council work. Over the course of 2007/08 Tony Blair would leave office to be replaced by Gordon Brown, the global recession would begin, and New Labour would struggle to hold itself together, ultimately losing power to a Conservative-Liberal coalition government in the 2010 election. Looking in more detail at the Arts Council, Peter Hewitt, the sitting Chief Executive, would resign following a poorly handled funding allocation in early 2008; the McMaster Review on *Supporting Excellence in the Arts* which represented an ostensible push back against the instrumental drive of New Labour would be published at roughly the same time; and the ten-year strategy *Great Art for Everyone* would begin development alongside a significant organisational restructure.

Taking all of these considerations into account, this 2007/08 period represents an ideal moment to undertake a reflective study of the recent past. It offers both a clearly identified vantage point on a decade of significant investment and policy interest from government and its bodies for the arts *and* it serves as a neat break-point against a number of national and sectoral changes that would send the Arts Council in different directions shortly afterwards: navigating cuts, articulating a new strategy, and taking responsibility for Museums and Libraries. These directions are certainly worthy of study but in a work of this size it would be unwise to pursue them in addition to my primary interest in New Labour as this split focus would mean that both periods would be less rigorously scrutinised in the space available. To be clear, this study is not entirely rigid in its historical

scope. Where necessary, either to provide useful contextual information or to strengthen a point being made with regards to the period, the analysis that follows incorporates information from before 1996/97 or after 2007/08. These moves are in service to the central interest of the thesis and will not lead to a breadth of study that renders the work indistinct or ambiguous.

To provide a couple of further clarifications on the geographical and disciplinary parameters of the work, I have opted to focus on the arts in England during this period, paying attention to the Arts Council England supported theatre sector. I have made this choice for two reasons. The first is personal interest. This thesis developed from my experiences and, as most of my involvement in viewing theatre has been in England or in watching English theatre companies, this is the area that I am most interested in examining because it is the one that has had, and will likely continue to have, the most bearing on my cultural consumption of live performances. This being the case, the opportunity to develop new and improved understandings of the processes that underwrite this work, particularly in such a rich and complex historical period, proved a remarkable opportunity when given the chance to outline a thesis.

The second reason for choosing England is that most of the literature that I have studied in the creation of this work takes cultural policies and practices in England as their primary focus. In certain pieces, there may be detours to other nations in the Union or to non-English, but UK based, theatre companies but, largely, the critical material that interrogates New Labour's cultural policies, Arts Council England's approaches and the impact of both on theatre practice takes England as the primary focus. Recognising this, my selection of England, not only allows me to contribute and offer reflections on the work in this tradition but it also renders the formulation of this thesis a more manageable task as, simply, there is more information at my disposal.

Methodology & Rationale

This thesis will examine the character of public policy in the UK cultural sector and explore its real-world effects on theatre companies, venues and audiences. It will focus its attention particularly on Arts Council England under New Labour, from 1996/97 to 2007/08, and explore three policy areas within this timeframe. Firstly, the economics of arts funding, understood as the funding rationale of Arts Council England. Secondly, Arts Council approaches to access and its consequences, understood as the policy and effects of trying to increase the number and diversity of audience members and also theatre companies. Thirdly, the shifting positions of aesthetic quality in the Arts Council policy agenda and the difficulties of articulating an aesthetic policy, understood as the challenge of delivering a philosophical objective within a policy framework. These areas were selected as the latter two are the chartered goals of the largest national body for the arts and are central to any

understanding of the intentions and impact of public policy in this sector. The former concerns the process through which the latter two are financially supported and so is worthy of consideration as it is the underlying mechanism that makes the pursuit these goals possible and, thus, provides a way of exploring what those who control the policy levers consider valuable. To conduct this examination effectively, this thesis will utilise an interdisciplinary methodology to identify the pertinent issues in each of these areas in the period and then analyse them through the application of a range of critical materials, configured as thinking tools.

To provide a detailed outline of this approach, I will undertake the discourse analysis of governmental and organisational policy materials, speeches by significant figures, organisational research documents and reviews, and the wider critical literature on the area. I will incorporate a range of materialist research that scrutinises funding documents from within the Arts Council but also draws on information from other quantifiable sources – including documentation from the Department for Culture Media and Sport, HM Treasury, central government and business advisory services. I will conduct interviews with figures who were a key part of the policy formulation and delivery process and talk to some of those who were affected by that process (theatre company directors, arts venue programmers). I will develop case studies of the work of different arts organisation (two theatre companies and one multiplatform venue) to explore the experiences and impact of funding decisions on supported organisations, thereby identifying the expectations of the Arts Council and gaining insight into the kind of working relationship it had with some of its clients. This range of work and the reason for its selection is that it will allow me to present a multi-faceted understanding of the pertinent issues in each policy area, incorporating quantitative and qualitative information that enables the identification of telling details and specific insights whilst never losing sight of the wider, sectoral picture.

Before moving on to discuss the critical theory dimension of this thesis, it is useful to provide a word on the reasoning behind, and the expectations of, the interviews and case studies conducted in the development of this work. These materials are the most original element of the thesis (literally, the gathering and generation of new information) and, in their primacy, present fresh articulations of and new insights into the issues identified in canonical secondary sources. The interviews and case studies for this thesis were pursued to provide practical, primary insights into how the different policy objectives identified through desk-based, secondary research played out in reality. They have thus helped illuminate the overlaps and differences between policy in theory and creativity in practice, the reception of those policies in different contexts and the ‘wiggle room’ that arts makers have within any given policy framework.³ They have also helped provide a better

³ See Interview with Mark Hollander, *Appendix*, p. 255

understanding of the nature of the relationship between arts makers and the Arts Council more broadly and, further, the structure of the organisation itself. Indeed, the range of those interviewed, from policy makers at a national level to regional Arts Officers to those receiving funding, has enabled me to develop a stronger foundational understanding of how the Arts Council and its theatre department works, as if it were a living organisation rather than a fixed monolith.

It is important to qualify that this interview and case study methodology was not without limitations. In total, five interviews are collected in the appendix of this thesis and the work of three theatre companies and arts venues form the basis of the case studies presented here. In spread, this work covers key positions in the policy process and a wide range of arts makers: hosting venues, touring companies and those that operate with a home base but also tour and partner where beneficial are all given a platform. These respondents, however, were not the only ones consulted in the development of this work. Requests were sent to numerous other companies and policy makers in the hope of generating more results and a deeper and wider understanding of the sector. However, due to practical limitations, including lack of responses, the issue of locating staff with experience of the period of study, and the extensive work commitments of those involved (busy touring schedules, for instance), these additional interviews could not be undertaken. Consequently, this primary research methodology has been shaped by the gap between my desired returns and the availability and interest of my prospective subjects. This is not to undermine the insights offered by the collected material but it is to stress that this work provides a limited range of response to the issues scrutinised in the context. Therefore, whilst I am confident in my conclusions as they are the product of overlapping thoughts between interviewees and are supported by findings in desk-based research, it is important to recognise that each one provides insight in a particular case. Thus, whilst these insights can be extrapolated to draw larger conclusions, they must also be recognised as limited to an extent and, as much as they may be accepted, they should also be considered as prompts for the discussion, testing and further considerations of policy and creative practice in the future.

From the assured base provided by this mixture of primary and secondary work, I will then apply a number of appropriate 'thinking tools'.⁴ Thinking tools is a term taken from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In pursuit of more detailed analysis and more robust findings he suggests that researchers should not be confined to a singular theoretical approach. This is because no approach, regardless of how rigorously applied, can grasp the complexity of a given social scene or uncover every conceivable insight into that scene. Instead, researchers should engage with the problems they face through a variety of different means and, whilst acknowledging the strengths of a given

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theorist, feel free to push past the ideas of that thinker, applying them where they are useful and challenging and adapting them where they are not. In effect, Bourdieu is suggesting that critical material should be used like tools to solve problems rather than as frames to fit problems into.

This approach is particularly applicable to Arts Council England as the organisation's work covers a breadth of policy areas that cannot be read effectively through a uniform critical lens. Aesthetic theory will not be particularly useful at breaking down the expectations and analysing the implications of organisational funding rationales, for instance. This would be better achieved through the application of cultural economics. Thus, to best develop new readings of the pertinent issues identified in each area, most convincingly theorise what this indicates about the character of the policy in that area of the sector and its implications, and then offer alternatives for policy development it is essential to adopt a varied critical approach. Accordingly, this thesis will match critical theory with appropriate topics in a reflexive application that scrutinises the critical materials as they are applied. This will provide a theoretically rigorous and insightful analysis that, both, improves understandings of the critical materials used and the area to which they are applied. In line with this application of materials, I have elected to incorporate the literature review of this thesis into each of the following chapters. This staggered move allows a concentrated study of materials relevant to each area that provides a timely and more manageable primer for the forthcoming critical work.

The consideration of the Arts Council's economics and funding rationale will be bolstered through the application of a range of cultural and political economic theory. Beginning with an outline of the global neoliberal turn and the identification of its ideological characteristics through the application of critical materials and foundational theoretical texts, this chapter will consider the extent to which this turn influenced the funding rationale of the Arts Council under New Labour. To aid this consideration, the chapter will take advantage of two more recent developments in cultural and political economics and use those to scrutinise the Arts Council's wider agenda, its material changes and the language of those involved in securing and distributing funds. One of these critical developments, coming from David Throsby's work in *Culture and Economics*, considers what kinds of values and returns an arts funding policy might pursue outside of the financial. The other, developing from an initial prompt in David Hesmondhalgh's essay "Were New Labour's Cultural Policies Neoliberal?", explores the limitations of neoliberalism as a critical concept. This mixture of critical theory will enable a reading of funding practice that, though acknowledging its capitalist bent (the government and the Arts Council expect something for the money they give), allows me to develop a wider notion of how cultural value was conceived and pursued by the Arts Council in this period. This chapter's mixture of materials will thus provide a theoretically rich critique of the

dominant understanding of the Arts Council as a neoliberal body and, alternatively, offer a new more accurate characterisation of its funding rationale.

The investigation into the efficacy of Arts Council England's policy for access will, building from a basis provided by Bourdieu, use two strands of research from the sociology of cultural consumption, recently developed in the UK. This work provides a more detailed assessment of the social factors that inform the likelihood of cultural engagement and opens new perspectives on the character and meaning of any given pattern of activity. In doing so, this work supports new interpretive possibilities that move beyond the limited, class-based and competitive readings offered by Bourdieu's work in *Distinction*. Specifically, it suggests that anybody has the potential to develop some variation on a form of omnivorous, paucivorous, univorous and inactive cultural identity. Each of these terms will be assessed in more detail in the chapter but the utility of working with them is that they provide a more effective way of characterising Arts Council policy for access and the public response to it. They thus enable a more detailed understanding of its successes and limitations and the reasons for them to be developed. They also offer a new way of theorising potentially beneficial changes to policy approach. This opportunity is something that the chapter will take advantage of in its latter stages. Specifically, a case study will be deployed to demonstrate some of the benefits that a move to an omnivorous and processual access policy might have.⁵

The scrutiny of the shifting position of aesthetic concerns within the Arts Council policy agenda will be bolstered by a mixed application of critical materials that include elements of the aesthetic philosophy of Immanuel Kant, a range of cultural policy studies and work on the mechanics of the policy formulation process. This hybrid approach enables the consideration of Arts Council England's aesthetic policy from an enduring and theoretically robust position. This is not to suggest that the policy is Kantian or that it measures up to Kantian thought but that this thought can help unpick some of its claims, teasing out some of the complexities around its shifting position within organisational thinking. From this base, the use of cultural policy studies and cultural mechanics will then ground these complexities in a thorough understanding of the policy formulation process. In doing so, the analysis of this chapter will demonstrate that by its very nature cultural policy is informed by instrumental pressures and therefore, regardless of the demand for more intrinsically motivated approaches, it is difficult for cultural bodies to establish the pursuit of excellence as a dominant and uncomplicated policy driver. Acknowledging this, the chapter will go on to suggest that rather than repeatedly fall into the trap of positioning policy as either instrumentally *or* intrinsically motivated, a more reasonable suggestion is to argue that it is a mixture of both. Specifically, that Arts Council England's policy towards excellence can be understood as one of

⁵ The use of the term omnivorous in the context of arts funding will be explained in detail in chapter three but, as an initial note, it is used to generally describe a modally, spatially and formally expansive acceptance of art forms and methods of public engagement.

conditioned beauty.⁶ The value of reaching this conclusion is that it, first, provides an effective reading of the nature of cultural policy within the period and, second, offers a new characterisation that enables us to avoid the extreme positions made available by the binary understanding of instrumental vs. intrinsic policy.

By working in this way, this interdisciplinary thesis will provide new readings of policy and its effects that serves a double function. Firstly, it will provide a range of compelling characterisations of the policy process and its impact on the arts sector in each of the identified areas of Arts Council work under New Labour. In doing so, it will improve our understandings of that organisation and the sector during a rich and complex period in the recent past. Secondly, this thesis will use the assured foundations provided by each of these new interpretations to offer outlines for, either, policy improvements (see, the suggestions for a processual access policy in chapter 2) or to call for the further testing of ideas established here (see, the outline of Utilitarian State Capitalism in Chapter 1). In achieving both, this thesis aims to have a multi-faceted, real-world impact. In the former case, the thesis can act as a prompt for the formulation of more assured and effective policy in the future. In the latter, its conclusions can act as the beginning of a challenge to trends in cultural policy analysis that have led to the establishment of common but generalised, and so misleading, readings of the organisation. By offering such provocations, this aspect of the thesis has the potential to generate more fruitful developments in the way we think about Arts Council England.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter one will outline the historical context that this thesis is engaging with. This history will begin with a discussion of Margaret Thatcher's election victory in 1979 and move from this forerunning administration through New Labour and onto those that succeeded them, closing with a brief consideration of the election of a Conservative majority in 2015. I have opted for this breadth as an account of the governance and cultural policies pursued by Thatcher and, later, John Major provide an example of how the embryonic instrumentalist policies and economic interests in the arts became embedded in governmental thinking and so contributed to New Labour's relationship with the Arts Council. In the middle period, a study of New Labour will provide a background knowledge that will be useful in framing the more specific studies and insights developed in the subsequent chapters. Finally, an exploration of New Labour's successors in government will provide a certain level of closure,

⁶ Again, this term will be explained in more detail in the later chapter, but, as an initial note, conditioned beauty originally described a natural object or artwork that provoked an aesthetic response despite evident conceptual parameters. It thus opened a middle ground between Kant's understanding of the beautiful and the good. Here, it is used to offer a new characterisation of the position of aesthetic considerations within the cultural policy process. This offer is part of a larger questioning of the entrenched idea that the central relationship in the arts policy context in the UK was between binarily opposed drivers of instrumental or intrinsic interest.

finishing the New Labour story in electoral terms, but also charting, to some extent, the ongoing impact that their policies had on the cultural sector after their removal from power.

Chapter two opens with an expanded account of the rise of neoliberal thought and its influence globally. Having established the global context, this historical overview narrows its focus to consider the rise of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, its cultural policies and the evolutionary impact it had on New Labour. This history then moves forward again to examine some of the reasons for New Labour's election victory before coming to focus on their cultural policy and the effect that it had on the Arts Council. Reviewing the arts and policy discourse of the period and the critical materials that responded to it, the chapter establishes the idea that whilst Tony Blair's government certainly took an increased economic interest in the arts during this period it is an inaccurate characterisation to suggest that their cultural policy and the funding rationale of the Arts Council supported by that policy was neoliberal. Drawing on a range of materialist analysis, secondary discourse analysis and primary interviews the chapter goes on to trouble this narrative by drawing attention to the multi-faceted nature of the Arts Council's agenda and the types of work its supported at the time, the significant material and institutional changes in the period and also asks questions about the sincerity of the language of policy makers in a consideration of what the value of arts makers talking to government in financial terms might be?

From this robust critical base, the chapter goes on in its final phases to outline an alternative interpretation of the funding rationale of the Arts Council in this period. This alternative is described as Utilitarian State Capitalism and suggests that during this period money was given by the Arts Council in pursuit of a wide range of returns. These returns may be financial in certain cases, but they are not overarchingly so in every case and, in fact, can be quite varied, with supported work offering a combination of aesthetic, spiritual, social, historic, symbolic and authenticity dividends. The validity of this new characterisation is then tested through three case studies of state supported theatre companies or arts venues. Each showcase that what these organisations offered the Arts Council (and the public) for the money they received, throughout the period of study, was a mixture of returns but in none of them was an explicitly neoliberal interest in profitable financial performance dominant. Having provided a theoretically rigorous alternative characterisation and offered a positive, practical testing of this idea, the chapter closes with the call for the further development and examination of this thinking in future work. The value of this would be the better understanding of the complexity of the organisational funding rationale in a period of explosive budget growth and heightened governmental interest. It would also, over a longer period, further unsettle and, perhaps help establish a more effective replacement for, neoliberalism, the currently dominant brand for the sector but one which has been questioned and shown to be too blunt a tool to provide accurate analysis.

In Chapter three I will interrogate the relationship between Arts Council England's efforts toward (and reporting on) increasing public access and its actual real-world effects. By examining a range of Arts Council England backed research material from 2001 to 2008, this chapter will initially show that whilst there are a series of headline documents and proclamations that show the Arts Council's efforts under New Labour met with some success, these belie more detailed findings that complicate any understandings of efficacy. Taking this complexity as a starting point, the chapter will examine each of these research documents in more detail to better illuminate the extent of the successes and limitations of the access policy developed by the Arts Council under New Labour. It will then apply recent developments in British cultural sociology in combination with insights drawn from primary research to develop an analysis that enables better understanding of why the Arts Council's impact on access was mixed in this way and where the potential for change may lie. Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate that the Arts Council and the public may each be considered as paucivorous in their tastes and practices. This is a characterisation that, though having a singular title can point and include many distinct cultural value systems and cultural capital economies. The problem with this, as the chapter will show, is that such variety prohibits processes of exchange or fruitful cultural overlap between these distinct groups and so impedes the Arts Council's efforts towards the increase of sustainable public engagement.

Having identified and characterised this problem, the chapter will then outline a solution designed to bring the cultural capital value systems of both the public and the Arts Council closer together, with the latter having to make efforts to alter its approach and become a more omnivorous organisation. To do this, the chapter will ultimately call for a change in approach to access, moving away from the formally narrow, demographically focused *who* policy of the New Labour years, towards a processual approach that supports *how* people engage with the arts. The possible practices opened up by this new direction will be explored through a case study at the close of the chapter which will show how such a processual approach may work in reality. In doing so, this chapter will have, by its close: provided a new characterisation of, and identified key issues with, the access policy of Arts Council England under New Labour and proposed a workable alternative that moves theoretical consideration of the issue forward and also holds the possibility for real-world impact

Chapter four brings us to the close of the period of study. Beginning with an outline of the Arts Council policy agendas from 2000-2008, the chapter will plot the changing position of the concern for artistic excellence in organisational thought. It will also demonstrate the rise of instrumental thinking in this period and the increasing interest from the Arts Council and government for artists to work towards social objectives: crime reduction, improvements in education, mental health provision. It will then plot the backlash against this turn and illuminate the debate between artists, government

ministers, Arts Council staff and thinktank researchers that increasingly called for change throughout the mid-part of the opening decade of the millennium. Having marked out the territory, the chapter will then introduce and begin to interrogate Sir Brian McMaster's *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*. Published in early 2008, this review was heralded as an end to target culture and the instrumental application of the arts and was celebrated as a re-centring of art's intrinsic values in the policy formulation process. As the chapter will go on to show, McMaster's impact in this regard was not as significant or as easily understood as his celebrants claim. Alternatively, through a close reading of the document and a consideration of external pressures upon it, this chapter will demonstrate that McMaster's review is a compromised document that includes, and is framed by, a range of socially instrumental considerations that he fails to acknowledge.

Having identified this compromised position, chapter will utilise a mixture of aesthetic philosophy, cultural policy studies and cultural mechanics to offer wider comment on the cultural policy formulation process. Rather than simply critique McMaster for being a shill for instrumentalism or abuse him for his faltering push to reclaim intrinsic values, this expanded analysis will offer a new reading of the policy formulation process that suggests that, given the nature of policy itself, a certain level of instrumental pressure is unavoidable. Therefore, rather than fall back into the oppositional understanding of policy drivers as either instrumental or intrinsic – a binary that has come to dominate the cultural policy discourse in the UK context – it is necessary to develop a more reflexive, hybrid understanding. This hybrid understanding is what the chapter will identify as a cultural policy of and for conditioned beauty. By working to this end, chapter four will offer a reflection on the trajectory of aesthetic thought in the policy approach of Arts Council England under the New Labour government that brings us to the close of this thesis' period of interest, it will open a wider discussion of the policy formulation process and offer a new and theoretically rigorous characterisation of that process, and it will cement this theoretical work with practical examples developed through interviews and case studies.

This thesis will thus make a detailed and significant contribution to the field of cultural policy research. By its close it will have plotted a clearer outline of recent history, established how longstanding cultural desires were informed by government pressure in this period, drawn out the implications of that pressure, and, finally, developed a range of new characterisations for Arts Council England's various policy approaches. These characterisations will be derived from the application of cultural economics, the sociology of cultural consumption, aesthetic philosophy, and primary research and will enable the discussion of the issues illuminated in this thesis in insightful, new ways. The value of this is that these new understandings will contribute to the academic discourse and, perhaps, contribute to the framing and delivery of more effective policy in the future. Having outlined the

context that this thesis is intervening in, identified the problems that it is responding to and offered a clear breakdown of its intentions, methodology, rationale and structure, I will now move forward onto the opening chapter which outlines the historical context that this thesis is engaging with.

Outlining the Historical Context and The Development of UK Cultural Policy 1979-2015

Margaret Thatcher, Neoliberalism and Embryonic Instrumentalism

Margaret Thatcher's election victory on 4th May 1979 came at the end of a tumultuous decade for Britain. The Conservative party that she led into government took charge of a country that had been racked by recession, devaluation of the pound, an international oil crisis and turbulent state-labour relations. On her arrival at 10 Downing Street, she described her task as Prime Minister in terms borrowed from Francis of Assisi, claiming that the new government would promote harmony and togetherness. It was apparent from the policies that followed, however, that Thatcher was driven by a more radical and divisive agenda. Breaking with the post-war consensus on welfare and the Keynesian economic orthodoxy, the Conservative government developed an overarching policy approach that was informed by neoliberalism. Derived from classical liberal economic thought, this ideology positioned the individual as the most powerful being in the economy and stressed that the best way for that individual to achieve their ends was through free markets unimpeded by state intervention. In line with this idea, Thatcher's government oversaw the move of many industries from public to private control, it imposed cuts and efficiency savings on many government departments and put through a range of legislation that enhanced the power of individual in several ways, whether by breaking the collective power of unions or enabling the right-to-buy for council house tenants.⁷ This array of policies transformed the infrastructure of the country and were hugely divisive, prompting celebrations, strikes and riots throughout the 1980s. They also changed the way that successive governments approached previously taken for granted policy obligations in a way that still informs contemporary politics. In the case of cultural policy, Thatcher's governance saw the beginning of a more explicit economic interest in the arts and a politically directed, socially instrumental agenda that continued development throughout the New Labour and Conservative-Liberal administrations that followed. Speaking at the time of Thatcher's funeral in 2013, coalition Prime Minister David Cameron suggested that 'we're all Thatcherites now', in testament to her enduring influence.⁸

In line with her neoliberal values, the cultural policy of Margaret Thatcher's government was marked by the 'limiting of the government grant-in-aid and [an increased] emphasis on business

⁷ For an informative (and highly critical) introductory analysis of neoliberal ideology and the governance of Margaret Thatcher see David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Also see the next chapter for a more detailed discussion of this terminology's characteristics and limitations.

⁸ David Cameron speaking to Radio 4, reported in The Telegraph on April 17th 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/9999947/Margaret-Thatcher-We-are-all-Thatcherites-now-says-David-Cameron.html>. Accessed July 2016. For a further outline of the development of neoliberal policies in a global and UK context please see the opening of the forthcoming chapter on the Arts Council's economic rationale.

sponsorship' as a way of financing the arts.⁹ In comparison to the previous decade which had seen the Arts Council budget grow by over five times its initial amount, the support given to the Arts Council in the 1980s did little more than double. In 1980/81 the organisation received £70.9 million and by 1989/90 this had risen to £155.5 million. This slowed growth meant that, whilst overall funding to the Arts Council increased, the real-term spending power of the organisation often struggled to keep pace with inflation. The impact of this belt tightening was immediately felt, with cuts to around 40 supported organisations in 1981. As a counter to this rollback of state support, the Thatcher government advocated an increase in business sponsorship of the arts, suggesting that this was a more sustainable and responsible source of income that did not burden the tax payer. The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), though founded in 1976, rose to prominence in this period and certainly facilitated stronger connections between the Arts Council's clients and private money. By the early 1990s the funds raised by this Association 'would exceed £60,000,000 a year'.¹⁰ Such figures were unprecedented a decade or two previously. However, even with this significant growth, private income could not cover the gap left by public cuts or standstill funding which led to shortfalls and problems in the sector.

Alongside these varied financial measures, the government also exerted a significant influence on the governance and working practices of the Arts Council and its clients. Analysts from management consultancy firms or from within the Arts Council itself conducted a number of performance reviews across the decade, scrutinising managerial practice, organisational efficiency and financial viability.¹¹ These reviews often generated complicated results that neither fit snugly with the small-state, pro-private rhetoric of government or the preservationist stance of the Arts Council as a necessary and effective organisation. The Priestley report of 1983, for instance, suggested that both the Royal Opera House and the Royal Shakespeare Company were underfunded *and* that both would benefit from a direct government control. This led to the frustrating compromise of increased but earmarked funding.

In addition to these persistent examinations there are also suggestions that Thatcher and her successive cultural ministers Paul Channon, Lord Gowrie and Richard Luce politicised the Arts Council throughout this period. It is important not to overstate the inaugural quality of this claim. It was not as if the relationship between the Arts Council and the government had been wholly apolitical previously. The close ties between Arnold Goodman (former Chair), Jennie Lee (former Arts Minister), and Harold Wilson (former Prime Minister) certainly testify to established political

⁹ Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain*, (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1995), p. 250

¹⁰ Sinclair, p. 339

¹¹ Please see "The Wilding Report", "The Priestley Report", "Partnership: Making Arts Money Work Harder" for just some examples of this phenomenon.

relations. Nevertheless, what is apparent is that nobody had been as blatant as Thatcher's administration in its recruiting of staff based on political allegiance. In 1982, Channon appointed William Rees-Mogg as Chair and Luke Rittner as Secretary General. Both candidates had clear ties to the Conservative Party. Rees-Mogg was a life peer and Rittner was the founder of ABSA, one of Thatcher's darling initiatives. At the time of their appointment, Arts Council Secretary-General Sir Roy Shaw commented that they were there to 'put the Arts Council right - to put it to the right'.¹²

In the event, Rittner and Rees-Mogg were not as subservient to political doctrine as expected. On numerous occasions both went to battle for the Arts Council and its clients. They talked to Thatcher privately to secure more funds, protested to Channon about excessive reviews and with their colleagues formulated radical policy changes that would enable the organisation to placate its critics and regain the initiative from overbearing arts ministers, most famously in 1984's *The Glory of the Garden*. The impact of these efforts was varied. They certainly influenced individual reputations – Richard Witts describes Rittner as the man who 'entered the Council so feared and left so loved' – but the extent of any positive consequences at an organisational level can be easily questioned.¹³ Money remained tight throughout the decade, reviews were perpetual, and the implementation of any radical policy remained stunted. The striking devolutionary impetus of *The Glory of the Garden*, which aimed at redressing the inequalities in funding distribution between London and regional centres and altering power relations, failed to make any significant distributive or structural change to the organisation, for instance.

This combined pressure on finance, manipulation of governance and overbearing expectations meant that, by the time of Thatcher's resignation as Prime Minister in November 1990, there was a palpable frustration in the cultural sector. The Arts Council was viewed as a rudderless institution that had little sense of (or care for) the needs of those it served. Instead, it was considered to prioritise the demands of government and, performing a 'more functional and entrepreneurial role', serve as the cultural wing of the civil service.¹⁴ The ultimate effect of this, to the joy of Thatcherite Conservatives and the distaste of artists, was that by the close of the 1980s 'the office was front of stage'.¹⁵

In the same period, there was also a shift in the nature of cultural policy research and reasoning. Notably, John Myerscough's work for the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) was the first significant text in the UK to address *The Economic Importance of the Arts*. Published in 1988, this text analysed data from studies of cultural practice as an economic entity in Glasgow, Ipswich and

¹² Sinclair, p. 253

¹³ Richard Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council*, (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1998) p. 485

¹⁴ Brian Appleyard, quoted in Sinclair, p. 313

¹⁵ Sinclair, p. 275

Merseyside and from here formulated some local and national conclusions. Myerscough suggested that the cultural industries were a significant part of British GDP, contributing more to state coffers than the motor industry. Further, he argued that, due to the nature of the product, cultural spending had significant multiplier effects which meant that it stimulated higher rates of direct and indirect job creation than other industries. For instance, a night out at the theatre might mean additional expenditure on dinner in a restaurant, rooms in a hotel or the use of public transport. On these economic arguments, Myerscough fashioned his case for public subsidy of the arts, ultimately suggesting that it should be maintained or even increased because it is a 'cost effective instrument for generating jobs'.¹⁶ At the time of writing, accepting all multiplier effects, the cost of an arts job to the exchequer, averaged across the three regions of the study, was £2,338. Comparatively, it would take £11,700 of public revenue expenditure in other fields to find work for an individual. The validity of this conclusion and elements of Myerscough's methodology have been challenged over the years. Critics from more right-leaning thinktanks (such as the Adam Smith Institute and the Thatcherite Centre for Policy Studies) have argued that Myerscough overplays his hand, exaggerating the multiplier effects of arts jobs whilst also ignoring the potential problem of cross-regional drain as investment in cultural hubs of one area draws employees from another.¹⁷ In spite of this, Myerscough's work remains a seminal text in the cultural policy field and by arguing for arts support on grounds other than intrinsic value, he 'set the stage for a generation of impact studies' that would expand the reasoning for support in new, financially oriented and socially instrumental directions.¹⁸

John Major, Structural Changes and Running Out of Steam

Taking over from Thatcher in November 1990 and winning the general election in 1992, John Major's tenure in office was marked by a number of significant changes to the structure of cultural governance and the sources of cultural income. It was also marred by the continuation of challenges that faced his predecessor. Utilising the momentum gained by his victory, Major set up the Department of National Heritage (DNH) in 1992 and positioned his long-time supporter, and former Arts Minister, David Mellor as Secretary of State. This department gave the arts a specifically cultural home in government for the first time, having historically occupied positions in ministries as varied as education and treasury. To critics such as Witts it marked the final victory of an increasingly interfering Whitehall and, whilst it is important not to get carried away with this point, there is

¹⁶ John Myerscough, *The Economic Importance of the Arts*, (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1988) p. 107

¹⁷ For evidence of this critical thinking David Sawers' *Should Taxpayer Support the Arts?* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1993)

¹⁸ For a more detailed consideration of this text and others that inform the critical work of this thesis, see the literature review.

clearly validity in the idea that the concentration of cultural matters in a single department increased the opportunities for government oversight.¹⁹

This manifested in the Major administration through a particular interest in the arts as a force for urban regeneration that went beyond job creation and economic outputs. Indeed, the 'early 1990s saw a sea-change in British urban regeneration policy' that sought to maximise the potential of the arts and make a more holistic contribution to the revitalisation of city spaces.²⁰ This could happen in a number of ways, whether using the arts to enable local populations to develop a stronger sense of ownership of their surroundings, providing more varied educational opportunities to deprived areas or nurturing cross-community cohesion through shared cultural practice. For a clear example of the strength of this thinking, and of the close connections between political desires and the interests of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), it is useful to look at the Demos-produced, Arts Council backed, *The Social Impact of the Arts* (1993). In addition to capturing political concerns at a particular moment, this text is also of interest because it is the first to identify 'a consensus across the arts funding system for taking forward an arts impact research agenda'.²¹ This agreement marks the beginnings of a more expansive embrace of the instrumental potential first tapped by Myerscough in the late 1980s and is of enduring significance because it is here that the instrumental turn, which would exert great influence on Major's successors and shape cultural policy for the next decade, began in earnest.

Elsewhere, Major's government oversaw the introduction of a National Lottery between 1993 and 1994. In addition to offering the public a chance to become millionaires overnight, the lottery also used a portion of its ticket sales to contribute to 'five good causes; art, charity, heritage, millennium projects and sport'.²² The money set aside for the arts was administered by the Arts Council and distributed annually, starting in 1995. The first lottery grant was £255.4 million, £64.3 million more than that year's government grant-in-aid to the Arts Council. This explosion in funding was undeniably welcome, with then Arts Council Chair Lord Gowrie describing it as making possible a 'cultural revolution'.²³ However, it also presented the Arts Council with a significant challenge. The scale of lottery funds available meant that questions were raised about the ongoing necessity of the government grant-in-aid. Why should the public be expected to support something through the burden of taxation when there is an abundant source of money generated by private consumer choice? Sidestepping the ethical question of gambling income as an unproblematic source of private

¹⁹ This is something that New Labour would later take advantage of.

²⁰ Michelle Reeve, *Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts: A Review*, (London: ACE, 2002) p.13

²¹ Reeve, p.15

²² Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) p. 27

²³ *The Arts Council of England 3rd Annual Report and Accounts 1996/1997*, (London: ACE, 1997), p. 6

income, the reasoning for two cash pots was that lottery money was unstable and due to fluctuate, as gradual decline in ticket sales have borne out.²⁴ Thus, it is not a suitable income stream on which to build a coherent and long-term policy for the arts.

It is also crucial to note that the lottery was not introduced as an alternative source of income but an *additional* one, intended to bolster good causes for the benefit of the nation, not to cover a removal of governmental responsibility. Consequently, the Arts Council argued that both income streams should be used, and that the government grant-in-aid be protected by this additionality principle. To shore up this protective distinction, the Arts Council initially refused to use lottery cash to support the revenue streams of its clients and, instead, put the new money into much needed capital projects such as building work and sectoral infrastructure. This was a transformative move but, at a time when grant-in-aid revenue funding stalled and failed to keep pace with inflation, leading to real-term losses of almost 10%, it was not without complications: 'By 1996 the paradoxical vision of gleaming new buildings with declining numbers of artists to fill them, or companies to run them, was becoming apparent'.²⁵ In response, the Arts Council lessened its restriction on the uses of lottery money, utilising a proportion of funds to support new initiatives such as Arts 4 Everyone and the Regional Arts Lottery Programme. This manoeuvre set a precedent for the manipulation of lottery funding and pragmatic compromises on principle that enabled later administrations to use lottery money as needed. In 2003, the Grants for the Arts programme utilised good causes resources to 'fund new talent, emerging grassroots arts and new and exciting innovative projects', making a clear contribution to content rather than capital development.²⁶ Later, in 2014, under the pressures of recession and public funding cuts, the Arts Council re-directed lottery cash to fund National Portfolio Organisations, in some cases to 100% of their need.

The third significant development under Major's government was the devolution of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1994. The breaking up of the parent body into respective Arts Councils for England, Scotland and Wales (with Northern Ireland following a year later) was the culmination of devolutionary arguments that had dogged the organisation since Keynes' Chairmanship. It also pre-empted later political shifts that would see the constituent parts of the UK gain more autonomy. In 1997, both Scotland and Wales voted for more independent control, with the former gaining devolved political and tax-varying powers of expenditure and the latter gaining a level of devolved political control through assembly. Though the union held, this combination of devolved political and artistic control meant that arts policy in these nations took on a more nationalist flavour from the

²⁴ *The Daily Mail*, "Lottery Ticket Sales Fall", taken from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-149115/Lottery-ticket-sales-fall.html>. Accessed July 2016.

²⁵ Tomlin, p. 28

²⁶ Jennie Kendall, "Welcome to Grants for the Arts", available at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/grants-arts>. Accessed July 2016.

mid-1990s onwards. This development should not be misconstrued as sinister or jingoistic. Instead, efforts by the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils to deploy the arts in the promotion of national identity have been described as 'inclusive and outward looking', both serving the emotional or spiritual needs of citizens and the financial needs of creative economic strategies.²⁷ In *Staging the UK*, Jen Harvie comments that the research and development of the Scottish National Theatre throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s eventually gave rise to a democratic model that would 'not impose a uniform Scottish identity or theatre practice, but [would] facilitate the articulation of different groups' identities, experiences, theatre practices and, even, different groups' Scotlands'.²⁸

In spite of these developments, Major was unable to successfully develop lasting solutions to some of the same challenges faced by the preceding administration. Rules on lottery funding, freezes and cuts on public grants and trends amongst business sponsors to go with a 'handful of larger arts organisations' meant that income streams were still a significant concern for many supported organisations throughout this decade of change.²⁹ Equally, the creation of the DNH, the expanding embrace of instrumental thinking and the devolution of a centralised and pan-national Arts Council, heightened sectoral concerns over encroaching political control. Consequently, the cultural sector spluttered along in the 1990s and, whilst the criticisms of artists towards the Arts Council and the government were not as vitriolic as previously, it was clear that the subsidised arts were *holding on* rather than heading in a confident or clear direction. This stalling sensation was both aided and mirrored by persistent changes at the DNH, which was led by seven ministers in seven years. The ultimate effect of this was that, by 1997, the Major administration seemed devoid of ideas, the new Arts Council of England was mired in a perpetual state of crisis control and the cultural sector was dispirited by nearly two decades of government policy that had promoted radical change but failed to deliver positively transformative results.

New Labour, New Directions and New Demands

The growing sense of staleness in the Conservative Party was countered by a resurgent Labour Party. Following defeats in the 1987 and 1992 general elections, Labour began a period of modernisation. With the death of their leader John Smith in 1994 and his replacement by Tony Blair, this move gathered pace. Blair made a number of significant and symbolic changes to the Labour Party in the run up to the 1997 election. In his first speech as leader he stressed that, whilst the public hated the Conservatives and their years of divisive ideology it was not enough to rely on this hatred for victory. Instead, Labour must communicate the extent of their development: 'I want them

²⁷ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) p. 23

²⁸ Harvie, *Staging the UK*, p. 23

²⁹ *Creative Industries Mapping Document 1998*, p. 82

now to know us, our identity, our character as a party, and change is an important part of that. We have changed. We were right to change'.³⁰ As part of this, Blair called for 'an up-to-date statement of the objects and objectives of our party'.³¹ This call was the death knell for Clause IV, a tenet of the Labour constitution of 1918 that aimed 'to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service'.³²

This abolitionist move, more than being an election savvy attempt to dispel fears of "old" Labour, was part of Blair's attempt to reconfigure socialism for the contemporary context. He defined it as a set of values that Labour should take to heart but challenged the idea that it provided an effective and fixed process for social change. Socialism might well be the goal, but it did not have to be the method. This distinction was a useful one in a post-Thatcher Britain, where a return to statist economics was not a viable proposition for any prospective government to make but the reassertion of more social ideals (such as communal cohesion and fairness) remained appealing. Thus, using the gap between product and process, and emphasising an evidenced-based policy approach where 'what counts is what works', Blair merged a belief in the meritocratic elements of capitalism with a 'genuine commitment to the redistributive social democracy that historically characterised the Labour movement'.³³ This hybrid was pitched as a third-way of thinking that moved beyond the oppositional ideologies of the twentieth-century and offered a more pragmatic politics that promised majority of the public with what they want: job security, decent wages, good education for their children and personal safety. In this way, Labour cast itself as a modern party for a modern Britain, a *New Labour* for a new millennium. The historic nature of the New Labour triumph on 1st May 1997, claiming a party record of 451 parliamentary seats, is testament to the impact of this pragmatic politics and the efficacy of Blair's transformative efforts.

Once in power, though initially tied by election promises to Conservative spending figures, New Labour began a process of transforming the government backed cultural sector. The old-fashioned DNH was changed into the dynamic and forward-looking Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Its mission, as articulated by the new Secretary of State Chris Smith, was to nurture a democratic culture guided by a commitment to aesthetic excellence, access, education and a thriving creative economy. Smith suggests that the reason for such priorities was not because of government investment in the charming but light-weight rhetoric of Cool Britannia that utilised

³⁰ Tony Blair, *Leader's Speech Blackpool 1994*, taken from <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=200>, Accessed July 2016.

³¹ Blair, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=200>, Accessed July 2016

³² Sidney Webb, *UK Labour Party Constitution 1918*, available at <http://www.labourcounts.com/oldclausefour.htm>. Accessed July 2016.

³³ Tomlin, p. 4

cultural work to win votes. Rather, it stems from New Labour's recognition of the power of culture to act as a personally and socially transformative force and serve as a powerful economic engine. He writes, counter to the antisocial anomie of Thatcherism, there *is* such thing as society, that we 'share identities in our local or national communities, and that these various senses of identity are shaped and linked by cultural impulses and activity'.³⁴ Simply, culture offers moments of communion, insight and personal transcendence. Therefore, after nearly 20 years of a damaging alternative doctrine, it was necessary for the new government to support reparative efforts in a significant way. Equally, in an increasingly post-industrial economy where the production of physical goods is outsourced to developing nations, the support of more immaterial cultural labour is 'a serious attempt to do what government legitimately can do in order to support a major economic force' that promises future wealth creation.³⁵ This double emphasis persisted throughout New Labour's time in government and, whilst the relationship between these issues are more complicated, it is useful to bear this foundational governmental interest in culture as a force for social inclusion *and* as a money making machine in mind when reading this thesis.

One of Smith's first actions was to define the remit of his department and then, in line with wider government practice, introduce output measures between his ministry and the NDPBs that it supported. These efforts led to the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* and Public Service Agreements (PSA), both in 1998. The former, developed in response to a lack of data and clear sectoral boundaries, marked the first effort by any government to plot the full range of economic potential of cultural practices. The identification of this range changed understandings of cultural practice from a government perspective. To be clear, longstanding recognitions of what is "cultural" persisted: the performing arts of theatre, opera and dance are included in the mapping exercise. Yet it also incorporated practices that, while utilising creative skills to deliver original ideas, were not conventionally identified as "cultural". Advertising, publishing and software, for instance, all become areas of government interest from 1998 onwards.

The reasoning for this more expansive shift is hotly debated. Advocates for New Labour suggest that it was an attempt to redress longstanding ignorance and take cultural and creative practice seriously. Critics argue that it was a more cynical move that allowed the DCMS to incorporate economically strong industries within its portfolio to counter certain weaknesses. For instance, the 1998 *Mapping Document* indicates that software revenues were around £8.7 billion annually. Comparatively, the whole performing arts sector (incorporating music, dance and drama) turned over £883 million, roughly ten times less than its IT bedfellow.³⁶ The value of bringing these

³⁴ Chris Smith, *Creative Britain*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 16

³⁵ Smith, p. 5

³⁶ See *Creative Industries Mapping Document 1998*, (London: DCMS, 1998) p. 96 and p. 80 for more details.

disparate industries together, then, was that, in the evidence-based climate of early New Labour years, it gave the DCMS more clout when bargaining with the Treasury and their Green Book guidelines which configured all spending decisions within a financial cost/benefit framework. Whatever the reason, the *Mapping Document* (and its successor three years later) is of great significance: it redrew the terrain and changed the dominant language of the sector, with the broader term “creative” replacing “cultural” in the common parlance. In doing so, it highlighted the economic interests of the ministry in the sector and bolstered the claims for the social impact of the DCMS’ clients. It also effectively justified a more pro-active and interventionist government role which, in combination with the implementation of PSAs, would have significant implications for Arts Council England and the other NDPBs.

Public Service Agreements were a ‘contract between government and citizens’ that were initially developed by Ed Balls, whilst working at the Treasury, to showcase New Labour’s successes against a range of election pledges and 600 other targets.³⁷ They were later taken up by Blair who, though trimming their number and coordinating them more efficiently, took an active role in scrutinising ministers about the targets and performance of their departments. This prime ministerial support was the ‘electrification’ of efforts to meet targets across all government sectors.³⁸ In the case of the DCMS, this meant vigorously pursuing six objectives. These objectives developed on the general themes discussed by Smith in *Creative Britain* and also outlined a number of specific measures for improvement, ‘increase by 500,000 by 2004 the number of people experiencing the arts’, for instance.³⁹ Although the DCMS’ implementation of the PSAs demanded more of its NDPBs and allowed for more direct influence, these moves were initially welcomed by the Arts Council and its clientele: ‘new policy directions have been introduced by the government and embraced by the Arts Council’.⁴⁰ As Robert Hewison comments, after years of being largely ignored, it was a very clear ‘move to the front door’ of policy making and, as much as there may be certain tolls to pay, it was certainly deemed to be worthwhile.⁴¹

As the money started to flow in 1998/99, the Arts Council used the significantly increased funds to administer the New Audiences outreach and development programme (1998-2003), to address a crisis in regional theatre provision (2001) and begin an expansive programme of putting the arts into schools via Creative Partnerships (2002-2011), to draw on some headline successes.⁴²

³⁷ Nehal Panchamia and Peter Thomas, *Public Service Agreements and the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit*, (London: Institute for Government, 2014) p. 1

³⁸ Panchamia and Thomas, p. 3

³⁹ HM Treasury, *2000 Spending Review: Public Service Agreements*, p. 31

⁴⁰ Arts Council of England, *Developing, Sustaining and Promoting the Arts in England: Annual Report 1998*, (London: ACE, 1999), page 5

⁴¹ Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*, (London: Verso, 2014) p. 46

⁴² The Arts Council’s grant-in-aid from government grew from £186.1 million in 1997 to £449 million in 2010. This represents a real term increase of 81 percent across the course of the New Labour government. See Hewison, p. 65, for more detail.

This was all in addition to offering greater support to existing clients to aid their pursuit of artistic excellence and diversifying the range of supported artists in a bolstered attempt to increase access.⁴³ However, this money was not given without caveat and, in addition to demands for the organisation to meet external targets, there was also significant pressure to make some internal changes. As the New Labour appointed Arts Council Chair, Gerry Robinson stated, the organisation was a 'shambles and the government wanted it sorted out'.⁴⁴ This sorting out of the public provision of cultural practice focused on streamlining the administrative costs and rendering the working practices of the organisation more efficient. It led to a number of structural changes throughout the period. The first was an attempt by Robinson and Peter Hewitt, Chief Executive, to slay the wasteful 'Kafkaesque bureaucracy permeating throughout the whole of the system from Government to Arts Council to Regional Arts Board'.⁴⁵ It culminated in the amalgamation of RABs into the Arts Council, in May 2002. This centralising move was a difficult one to deliver. Indeed, Robinson's centralisation of the control of the RABs (ultimately secured under the threat of budget removal) did not lead to outright mutiny but it was not without consequences. Staffing costs fluctuated throughout the negotiation period, relationships between central and regional staff members became fractious and it distracted the Arts Council from its primary function: supporting the arts. Further, whilst significant, this reorganisation effectively illuminated structural tensions that the organisation would struggle to resolve over the next decade. The dominance of the centre, the lack of national coherence on strategy and an organisational culture in which decisions are made and implemented in near secrecy are all issues that would dog later Chairs and Chief Executives.

Tessa Jowell, Targetolatary and Cultural Backlash

Despite overseeing the establishment of free entry to museums, negotiating significant increases in cultural budgets and effectively outlining the New Labour "creative" agenda, Smith and his ministerial team were sacked in the reshuffle that followed the 2001 election. Problems over 'the National Lottery licence, the financial problems of the Royal Opera House and the troubled saga of the Millennium Dome' (something which Smith privately opposed) were reported as the cause.⁴⁶ He was replaced by Tessa Jowell, a committed Blairite, who oversaw further increases in funding and continued government interest in the socially instrumental qualities of the work of the Arts

⁴³ Of particular interest throughout the New Labour period were the Black and Minority Ethnic, Disabled and Socially Excluded groups who the Arts Council frequently positioned as priority groups.

⁴⁴ Hewison, p. 96

⁴⁵ Hewison, pp. 96-97

⁴⁶ BBC Politics, *Profile: Lord Smith*, 15th February 2014, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-26116881>, accessed August 2016.

Council.⁴⁷ She also began to field growing criticisms from members of the arts community that the pressures, expectations and targets placed on them were too constricting and bound producers to a blinkered social inclusion agenda at the expense of the fundamental value of the arts. In an emblematic and provocative piece from *The Observer*, Nicholas Hytner, the Artistic Director of the National Theatre, declared ‘there’s nothing inherently good about any particular audience. We mustn’t judge the success of an artistic enterprise by its ability to pull in an Officially Approved Crowd’.⁴⁸ In spite of this frustration, the coherent articulation of what the *fundamental value* of the arts is and a plan to nurture it was not forthcoming from critics and, whilst there was a marked resurgence of interest in the intrinsic qualities of the arts in this period, it was delivered in generalities. In the same article, Hytner stressed that it is more ‘fulfilling to live in a society actively engaged in wondering what’s beautiful and what’s truthful’.⁴⁹ This may be the case, but he did not go on to explain what qualifies as beautiful or truthful and how a government policy might best support those qualities.

Jowell responded to this pressure in 2004 with a personal essay entitled *Government and the Value of Culture*. This work advocated a move away from the ‘top down social engineering’ of current cultural policy that sought to deliver socially instrumental results through the arts.⁵⁰ She argued that such efforts were narrowing the language and arguments for the arts, at a political level, and also warping the arts in a way that lessened the likelihood of such creative work realizing the ultimate value of ‘*what it does in itself*’.⁵¹ As an alternative, Jowell advocated a return to the pursuit of more intrinsic values as this would grant the Arts Council greater freedom to nurture the profound and complex potential of its supported forms. This intention was celebrated by the Arts Council, with then Chair, Christopher Frayling, suggesting that ‘when Tessa Jowell published her pamphlet about the value of culture last year, no one cheered louder than I did. *It put the quality of the work at the centre of public debate*’ [my emphasis].⁵²

Despite such celebrations and the apparent setting out of a new, intrinsic stall there are a number of issues within and around Jowell’s work that raise questions about the extent and impact of the turn in her thinking. Scrutinising her prose, it is evident that Jowell utilises socially engaged terminology to help characterise and frame her more intrinsic arguments. In a particularly telling example, she reasons that the highest quality arts should be pursued because they provide a means

⁴⁷ Grant-in-aid funding under Jowell moved from 252.4m in 2001/02 to 426.5m in 2006/07

⁴⁸ Nicholas Hytner, “To Hell with Targets” in *The Observer*, 12th January 2003, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/jan/12/featuresreview.review>, accessed August 2016.

⁴⁹ Hytner, “To Hell with Targets”

⁵⁰ Tessa Jowell, *Government and the Value of Culture*, (London: DCMS, 2004), p. 9

⁵¹ Jowell, p. 8

⁵² Christopher Frayling, *The Only Trustworthy Book: Arts and Public Value* (London: ACE, 2005), p. 26

of slaying the sixth giant of poverty – ‘the poverty of aspiration which compromises all our attempts to lift people out of physical poverty’.⁵³ This language indicates that the arts, though recognised for their intrinsic worth, are still conceived as having a social use and that the government is as keen as ever to maximise this. In fact, the allusion to slaying giants, positions Jowell’s rhetoric in a tradition of social concern and government mission that descends from William Beveridge and the reforming post-war Labour Government.⁵⁴ This implies that, rather than representing a move in a wholly new direction, the approach outlined in *Government and the Value of Culture* represents a new articulation of an established and more directive style of governance. It may be that this articulation pushes the intrinsic value of the arts further than Smith did (and was consequently welcomed by the arts sector) but this does not mean that the government was exerting any less influence on that sector.

This suggestion of continued influence is borne out by a number of examples. Following Jowell’s attempt to address concerns and roll back state interference, Frayling opined that the Secretary of State continued to exert pressure on the Arts Council. ‘I have noticed these letters are becoming more prescriptive – and much more detailed. In 2000 the settlement letter from the then Secretary of State, Chris Smith, was three pages long. In 2004, Tessa Jowell wrote me seven pages, more than twice the length of the 2000 letter, with much ring-fencing of sections of the Arts Council’s budget for specified purposes’.⁵⁵ This directive pressure was mirrored by the failure of more intrinsic, aesthetic values to manifest clearly in Arts Council priorities in the wake of *Government and the Value of Culture*. From 2006 to 2008, the organisation was concerned with issues of ‘taking part in the arts, children and young people, the creative economy, vibrant communities, internationalism [and] celebrating diversity’, none of which are explicitly concerned with quality.⁵⁶ Finally, it is significant to note that James Purnell, Jowell’s successor, stated that whilst targets were useful in 1997, their continuing power means that ‘we risk idolising them’ in a way that is detrimental to cultural practice.⁵⁷ This statement, and Purnell’s consequent efforts to bring intrinsic concerns back to the centre of policy making, indicates that despite Jowell’s articulation of an alternative in 2004 there was still persistent pressure to meet social targets by the time of her departure from office, in 2007.

In addition to the harmful externalities already discussed there is also the concern that the decade long dominance of this target-driven social inclusion agenda was not successful on its own terms. A number of research documents produced between 2005 and 2008 indicate that, in spite of sustained efforts to increase public engagement with the arts, there were no seismic shifts in audience

⁵³ Jowell, p. 3

⁵⁴ For an excellent account of Beveridge’s work on the five giants of poverty and its impact on the policies of subsequent governments see Nicholas Timmins’ *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State*, (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 2001)

⁵⁵ Frayling, p. 17

⁵⁶ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2006*, (London: ACE, 2006) p. 1

⁵⁷ Hewison, p. 41

make-up or proportional levels of overall attendance. On the contrary, findings across research indicate that many of the public felt like they were being *pushed away* from the arts in this period. *Taking Part in the Arts* and *The Arts Debate* were both noteworthy research projects. Beginning in 2005, *Taking Part* was an annual cultural survey administered by the DCMS that engaged with around 29,000 people deemed to be representative of the English public on issues of cultural engagement. *The Arts Debate* was the Arts Council's first ever public value enquiry that, in celebration of the organisation's sixtieth birthday in 2006, sought to find out what the public (and other stakeholders) thought about the arts, knew about the Arts Council and enjoyed doing in their own time.

The results of both studies were not encouraging. *Taking Part* found that as many as 84% of the public did not engage with the arts on a regular basis.⁵⁸ Further, it discovered that, despite a number of drives in priority areas (black and minority ethnic, disability and social exclusion), the uptake of the arts by those groups had failed to meet target and, in some cases, levels of engagement had actually fallen. Between 2001-2006, the proportion of black and minority ethnic people attending the arts dropped from 32% to 30%, for instance.⁵⁹ Perhaps most damning was the discovery of a significant proportion of the public who were actively 'anti-engaged' and confidently 'self-excluding' from the arts.⁶⁰ This was a population that avoided the arts, not because of limiting physical or psychological factors that could be remedied through policy initiatives or added investment, but because they were making a *choice* to do something more appealing to their tastes. The discovery of such empowered, alternative decision makers was a concern for policy makers and artists as it indicated that the wealth of access initiatives may ultimately have been pre-destined to prove ineffective as you cannot entice people who are not willing to be enticed. In highlighting this issue, these research documents drew attention to the limitations of New Labour attempts to use cultural practices to deliver a more broadly socially inclusive agenda and ultimately raises the question what and how might a more effective Arts Council access policy be developed?⁶¹

James Purnell, *Supporting Excellence and the End of New Labour*

The combination of challenges without and failures within meant that after ten years, the target oriented, social inclusion agenda of New Labour's cultural policy was ripe for change. However, the creation of a more aesthetically motivated policy agenda that centred on the intrinsic worth of creative practice was not as smoothly developed as it might have been. In June 2007, Tony Blair resigned and Gordon Brown took up the premier seat in government. In his first cabinet reshuffle,

⁵⁸ The threshold for regular being the relatively low measure of three times a year.

⁵⁹ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 06*, p. 33

⁶⁰ Creative Research, *The Arts Debate: Findings of Research Among the General Public*, (London: Creative Research, 2007) p. 11 and Bunting et al, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm: Patterns of arts attendance in England*, (London: ACE, 2008), p. 67

⁶¹ This question will be addressed in a later chapter on access.

Brown changed Jowell's portfolio, stripping her of her responsibilities as Secretary of State for Culture and adding Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General to her responsibilities as Minister for the Olympics. She was replaced at the DCMS by James Purnell, one of Brown's allies. This was a significant move because 'where Jowell had merely worried about targets, Purnell was ready to use his position as Secretary of State for Culture to condemn what he called *targetolatory* outright'.⁶² In July, he commissioned Sir Brian McMaster, a member of the Arts Council's National board and a former director of the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival, to produce a review that offered a 'real shift' in approaches to state support of the arts.⁶³ *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement* appeared six months later, at the beginning of 2008. After ten years of quantifiable measures and target culture, it made the case for a return to the qualitative judgements of experts, 'people with the confidence and authority to take tough decisions', and, for the first time in Arts Council history, placed a specific definition of excellence at the centre of policy concerns.⁶⁴ 'Excellent culture takes and combines complex meanings, gives us new insights and new understandings of the world around us and is relevant to every single one of us'.⁶⁵ McMaster reasoned that, by following this (re)turn to judgement, the Arts Council could help develop work of higher aesthetic quality and, in doing so, achieve a range of personal transformations. These transformations would, in turn, have profound social impacts but they would not be generated at the cost of stifling and small-minded instrumental measures.⁶⁶

McMaster's work was a break with the dominant organisational thinking and, supported by Purnell's hatred of targets, might have been a transformative document for the Arts Council. However, a number of contextual factors ensured that its impact in practice was limited. Firstly, in the same month that McMaster delivered his review, Purnell was moved to the Department of Work and Pensions and so was unable to deliver the claims of his commission. His successor, Andy Burnham, did not push the review with the same zeal, and though acknowledging the value of McMaster's call for a government step-back, the new Secretary of State outlined an array of cultural concerns that harked back to Smith's founding principles shortly after taking up the post.⁶⁷ Secondly, the credit crunch and recession that began in 2007 led to slowdowns in government funding and a higher degree of scrutiny of the money that was spent. Unlike the heady explosion in cash at the millennium, the rise of the

⁶² Hewison, p. 143

⁶³ Brian McMaster with a foreword by James Purnell, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*, (London: ACE, 2008) p. 4

⁶⁴ McMaster, p. 6

⁶⁵ McMaster, p. 9

⁶⁶ This idea of intrinsic art that can better achieve instrumental outcomes and other complications of McMaster's document will be discussed in more detail in the later chapter on excellence.

⁶⁷ Andy Burnham, "Confidence the Biggest Change in the Arts World" in *The Telegraph*, 13th April 2008, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturereviews/3672566/Confidence-the-biggest-change-in-arts-world.html>, accessed August 16.

grant-in-aid between 2007/08 and 2008/09 was a little over £14 million. Though above inflation, this amount is indicative of an increasingly cautious atmosphere that was not conducive to radical policy change. Finally, and most immediately, the timing of the publication of the McMaster report was poor.

In January 2008, the Arts Council was bound up in a scandal over funding decisions relating to the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). This CSR had seen the Arts Council receive a 3.3% rise in its grant. This growth had not been predicted by the organisation who had planned for a '5% real term cut, standstill or 2.7% inflation increases'.⁶⁸ In spite of this unexpected rise, the Arts Council ultimately cut funding from over 100 Regularly Funded Organisations (RFO), with 990 RFOs in 07/08 dropping to 883 RFOs in 08/09. They defended this cull as an attempt to reshape the cultural portfolio of the country to ensure that the spread and quality of work best served the most people. They further pointed out that the possibility of cuts had been signalled to funded organisations twice previously, with letters to all clients in May and October. Regardless of these defensive efforts, arts organisations (both cut and uncut) were furious at this decision. Their grievances focused on the secretive nature of the decision-making process and a lack of comprehension over how the Arts Council can justify the single largest number of cuts to supported organisations since Thatcher in the wake of an above inflation grant increase. Responding to these grievances, Peter Hewitt agreed to discuss the concerns of supported organisations at the Young Vic theatre. There, he faced a baying audience and, whilst he 'proved himself to be courageous' in the debate, he was unable to win over critics.⁶⁹ By the close of the meeting, '500 of the country's top actors passed an unprecedented vote of no confidence' in the Arts Council and Hewitt subsequently resigned.⁷⁰

Taking over as Chief Executive in this period of crisis, former DCMS staffer Alan Davey set about restoring faith in the organisation. In this environment, the implementation of McMaster's suggestions became less of a priority. Davey adopted a few of his ideas as effective placatory measures (the re-introduction of artist-on-artist peer reviews, for instance) but he was careful not to make any far reaching or radical changes at such a turbulent time. His primary focus was defusing tensions surrounding the RFO Investment Strategy of 2007/08 and ensuring that such a debacle never happened again. He commissioned Genista McIntosh, a seasoned arts administrator, to investigate the process, identify its shortcomings and outline some possible areas for change. Her review offered 11 recommendations which Davey grouped together under the conciliatory title *Lessons Learned*. These recommendations suggested changes to a variety of directive, structural and relational practices. McIntosh particularly emphasised the need to counter the lack of wider awareness of

⁶⁸ Genista McIntosh, foreword by Alan Davey, *Review of Arts Council England's regularly funded organisations investment strategy 2007-2008 – Lessons learned*, (London: Arts Council England, 2008), p. 17

⁶⁹ Arts Council England, *Review 08*, (London: ACE, 2008) p. 8

⁷⁰ Nigel Reynolds, "No Confidence in Arts Council England" in *The Telegraph* 10th January 2008, accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1575101/No-confidence-in-Arts-Council-England.html>, accessed August 16.

Council strategy and coherent leadership, the low levels of client confidence in the organisation's management of its frontline relationships, the lack of clarity over funding criteria and a more general concern with the openness of the whole Investment Strategy of 2007/08. Prompted by this work, Davey pursued an organisational restructure and the simplification of the funding application process.

Following *Lessons Learned*, Davey delivered a 15% cut in organisational administrative costs. He restructured the Arts Council's regional-metropolitan relations so that the four national regions (defined by the compass points) reported to the head office of London, who gave direction and oversight to these slimmed down bodies. He introduced a range of Relationship Managers to mediate between supported organisations and the Council. He changed the language and demands of funding agreements, developing a more transparent articulation of expectations of RFOs before, in April 2012, reconfiguring the client base as National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs).⁷¹ The combined effect of this was that by 2010, the Arts Council had undergone a transformation. It had stabilised itself from the crisis of 2007/08, it had restored some faith in its clientele and it had developed a new ten-year framework, *Great Arts for Everyone*, that outlined a clear and explicit plan for the arts and put in place evaluative procedures that would allow the organisation to 'recognise better our collective achievements'.⁷² At first glance, this mixture of planning and evaluation might seem like a continuation of the instrumental thinking that had been criticised by ministers since 2004. However, such an understanding misses the significant changes to Arts Council priorities. The new plan put aesthetic excellence as Goal 1 and, whilst it is fair to say that socially instrumental thinking permeated other goals (for instance, Goal 5 was the delivery of cultural opportunities to all children), it is important to note that the evaluative process was more open. The top-down, target culture of New Labour's early years was replaced by a dialogic approach that involved 'discussions with artists, arts organisations and our partners and stakeholders in order to assess progress and encourage innovation and new ideas'.⁷³ Consequently, the backlash against instrumental constraints was minimised.

Published in November 2010, this plan faced the challenge of being conceived in one world but born into another. New Labour were succeeded by a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition following the general election in May of that year. The new government delivered its first CSR in October. Fuelled by the perception of a habitual and grievous New Labour overspend and still wrestling with the tumult of global recession, this CSR demanded radical cuts to cultural budgets as part of a more austere approach to governmental expenditure. The DCMS was instructed to make £400 million of budget cuts by 2014/15, which translated into a 29.6% budget cut for the Arts Council

⁷¹ For insight into the more transparent expectations of RFOs see *The Relationship Between Arts Council England and its Regularly Funded Organisations*, (London: ACE, 2010).

⁷² Arts Council England, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework for the Arts*, (London: ACE, 2010) p. 13

⁷³ Arts Council England, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*, p. 13

in the same period. In addition, the incoming Secretary of State for Culture, Jeremy Hunt, imposed conditions on spending which meant that the Arts Council was not given free rein on where to wield the knife. Hunt demanded that front-line organisations face a maximum of 15% reductions in their support, whilst back-office budgets of the Arts Council be subject to a 50% cut. The reasoning Hunt offered for this was that, conscious of how artists may be wary of a Conservative culture secretary, he wanted ‘fewer people in the arts world waking up in a cold sweat’.⁷⁴ Thus, building on a charm offensive developed in opposition that saw him ‘pitching up to lots of events, gamely giving speeches, attending conferences, showing willing’ Hunt used these caveats to position himself primarily as an encourager of the arts, even in stringent circumstances.⁷⁵ However, it is evident that Hunt’s emphasis on back office efficiency and his ‘sudden, immediate, brutal culling of the UK Film Council and Museums, Libraries, Archives Council’ were not the product of an overarching love for the state supported cultural sector.⁷⁶ Instead, they represent a continued adherence to the neoliberal ideologies favoured by Thatcher and adapted by Blair. Indeed, the severity and speed of cuts indicate an ideological commitment to small-state thinking, rather than a considered response to any failings of the Film or Museums, Libraries and Archives Councils.

Responding to this pressure, the Arts Council imposed 6% cuts on all funded organisations and raided its Lottery and savings deposits to create or continue a number of contingency funding initiatives, including *Sustain* and *Catalyst*. *Sustain* was an open-access £40 million fund that was designed to provide ‘extra financial support and expert help and advice for organisations under pressure specifically as a result of the recession’.⁷⁷ *Catalyst* was initially pitched as ‘a £100 million investment scheme to help the art and culture sector become more sustainable, resilient and innovative’.⁷⁸ In practice, this fund was used to help organisations build fundraising capacity, establish endowments and attract match funding from private sources. In a period of limited public resources, this drive to attract other incomes is certainly laudable in the short-term. However, it is important not to forget the possible long-term consequences of this effort and see how it ties into wider government approaches to economic policy. Indeed, the emphasis on establishing resilient private relations and the size of the budget to do so (*Catalyst* was roughly a quarter of the Arts Council grant-in-aid at the time) indicates the strength of governmental commitment to shrinking the influence of the public sector. A possible consequence of this is that supported forms became increasingly prey to the

⁷⁴ Hewison, p. 161

⁷⁵ Charlotte Higgins, “What did Jeremy Hunt achieve for the arts and culture?” in *The Guardian* 4th September 2012, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/charlottehigginsblog/2012/sep/04/jeremy-hunt-arts-legacy>, accessed August 16.

⁷⁶ Higgins, “What did Jeremy Hunt achieve for the arts and culture?”

⁷⁷ Editorial Staff, “ACE Pledges £44.5m to *Sustain* Arts in Recession” in *What’s on Stage*, 24th April 2009, available at http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/news/04-2009/ace-pledges-445m-to-sustain-arts-in-recession_17336.html, accessed August 16.

⁷⁸ Arts Council England, *History of the Fund: Catalyst Arts*, available at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/catalyst-evolve>, accessed August 16.

pressures of the marketplace and subservient to private companies driven by financial, rather than aesthetic or social, concerns. The ultimate effect could be that the changes in funding structure encouraged by this government's cultural policy (growing private reliance) may lead to the deprioritisation of long-term policy goals (aesthetic excellence and social access) and as much as the arts sector may be rendered resilient by this process it is important to ask; resilient enough to deliver what and for who?

In these stringent and increasingly pressured circumstances, it is unfair to say that the overall strategy of the Arts Council changed. *Great Art for Everyone* was still the dominant plan and it was, in fact, extended to 2020, albeit, recalibrated for this new reality. Evidence of this recalibration can be seen in large-scale structural changes made on the grounds of organisational efficiency and savings, the Arts Council taking responsibility for Museums and Libraries in 2013, for instance. It can be also found in the reports and comments of Arts Council leadership which increasingly stressed the ability of the Arts Council to make money, not as a particularly priority, but as an underlying ability and natural consequence of its work. In her opening comments to the 2010 review, Chair Liz Forgan celebrated a direct link between the Arts Council's work and the growth of the creative economy: 'The arts are more universal and more appreciated than they've ever been and are at the forefront of our future prosperity, with *our investment* feeding the creative industries with the talent and skills they need to continue to grow at one of the fastest rates of any of our economic sectors' [my emphasis].⁷⁹ Later, her successor, Peter Bazalgette would use his second example of excellent art (in the opening of his first review) to directly espouse the economic benefits of the Arts Council's work: 'a shrewd collaboration with Kent County Council has resulted not only in a hugely popular attraction but also a stimulus for employment, new businesses and tourism'.⁸⁰ Harvie suggests that the zenith of this money-making thinking was presented in 2011 by Tom Fleming and Andrew Erskine in the Arts Council and government-backed *Supporting Growth in the Arts Economy*. This document reconfigured artists as 'micro-creative businesses' and reconstituted the Arts Council's commitments to excellence and access through the parlance of commerce.⁸¹ Fleming and Erskine suggest that 'the Arts Council needs to establish a position between *supporting supply and nurturing demand*' [my emphasis].⁸²

In light of this range of evidence, it is clear that the economic interest in the arts that began under Thatcher and was continued by New Labour accelerated further under the Coalition government. The combination of a dominant right-leaning economic ideology and circumstances in which there was a common frustration with the extent of public expenditure meant that the

⁷⁹ Liz Forgan, *Annual Review 2010* (London: ACE, 2010), p. 3

⁸⁰ Peter Bazalgette, *12/13 Arts Council England Grant-in-aid and Lottery Annual Reports and Accounts*, (London: ACE, 2013) p. 10

⁸¹ Tom Fleming and Andrew Erskine, *Supporting Growth in the Arts Economy*, (London: Fleming Creative Consultancy & Arts Council England, 2011), p. 7

⁸² Fleming and Erskine, p. 88

administration could drive an agenda of efficiency savings, increased private relations and cuts to state support of the arts. The long-term implications of this move have been touched on above but there is still the more direct, practical question of did this move work in the short-term? Was it an effective approach to state support of the arts in strained economic conditions? Between 2009 and 2014 the theatre sector, for example, showed great resilience to the austere circumstances and actually thrived in many ways. There was an almost 10% growth in productions or co-productions between 2009 and 2014, with the overwhelming majority of these productions coming from 'Out of London [theatres or] Touring Companies'.⁸³ In the same period, there was more than a 25% surge in the production of new writing, with 137 plays in 2009 growing to 172 plays in 2014.⁸⁴ This surge in production had a notable knock-on effect on reception levels. Arts Council research suggests that 22.7% of adults attended a play or drama in 2013/14.⁸⁵ This is a statistically significant increase on attendance levels recorded at the beginning of the recession in 2008/09. Equally, the Society of London Theatre reports that venues in the capital boasted consecutive record breaking attendances in 2013 and 2014.⁸⁶

However, underlying these impressive figures are growing financial concerns which could prove detrimental to future sectoral strength. The year 2011 was considered by Jeremy Hunt and the coalition government to be *The Year of Corporate Philanthropy*, an initiative that encouraged the best of American-style giving and aimed to mesh it with European-style state support. This was done in the hope of creating a powerful mixed model alternative that offered a long-term solution to persistently growing levels of public expenditure. However, governmental emphasis on this scheme did not generate the desired results and, despite 'the most radical and generous reforms to charitable giving in over 20 years', the levels of corporate giving fell for the fourth year running in 2011.⁸⁷ 'Business donations have decreased by more than 20 per cent since their peak in 2007, and fell 7 per cent to £134.2m in the year to the end of March 2011'.⁸⁸ This drop in business expenditure was compounded by a 2015 study which found that 'the arts is the least popular charitable cause' amongst the public, making up just 1% of all donations.⁸⁹ In the midst of a severe recession these responses are not necessarily surprising. There is little logical sense to the idea that private money will naturally fill the gap left by a retreating public sector. In failing to recognise this, and looking at the patterns of giving,

⁸³ Ian Youngs, "The State of UK Theatre: In Numbers" from *BBC News Entertainment and Arts* 4th February 2015, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-31055373>, accessed August 16.

⁸⁴ Youngs, "The State of UK Theatre in Numbers"

⁸⁵ Arts Council England, *Taking Part 2013/14: Findings for Theatre*, p. 16

⁸⁶ Matthew Amer, "New Audience Record Set in 2014" in *Official London Theatre* 6th February 2015, available at, <http://www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk/news/latest-news/article/item270479/new-audience-record-set-in-2014/>, accessed August 16.

⁸⁷ George Osborne quoted in "Gift aid reform and tax relief figure prominently in budget" in *Third Sector* 23rd March 2011, available at <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/gift-aid-reform-tax-relief-figure-prominently-budget/finance/article/1061503>, accessed August 16.

⁸⁸ Salamander Davoudi, "'Year of Corporate Giving' to arts fails to deliver" in *The Financial Times* 28th February 2012, available at, <https://www.ft.com/content/0027c3bc-615a-11e1-94fa-00144feabdc0>, accessed August 16.

⁸⁹ Frances Richens, "Arts is least popular charitable cause" in *The Arts Professional* 10th April 2015, available at, <http://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/arts-least-popular-charitable-cause>, accessed August 16.

it is clear that this strategy is not a viable long-term solution for arts support. Indeed, whilst the contemporary levels of corporate giving may have covered the cuts demanded by the 2010-2015 coalition, they do not provide the assured basis for future planning. Consequently, whilst theatres may have shown resilience over the last few years in weathering a bad situation there is no guarantee that they can continue to do so with shrinking public budgets and uncertain private support. With this uncertainty in mind, it is clear that despite the coalition government's intentions and the claims of an emotive policy discourse (the arts are robust, resilient and sustainable) the state supported arts struggled between 2010 and 2015 and, as much as spectacular successes (the cultural Olympiad) and coups for British Creatives (securing production deals for the new "Star Wars" films) were trumpeted, it is evident that 'the golden age' of state supported culture had passed.⁹⁰

The election of the Conservative majority government in May 2015 is beyond the remit of this thesis but I offer a brief analysis to bring this history to a close. Released from the more moderate impulses of their Liberal partners, the government continued to cut public budgets and emphasise the importance of a vibrant private sector. The budget of 2015 promised £37 billion in public spending cuts whilst also pledging to lower corporation tax to 18% by 2020.⁹¹ In spite of these further financial drawbacks, there was still significant government interest in the financial potential and social utility of the arts. This was marked by slight but evident increases in the Arts Council's budget. In the autumn statement of 2015, despite administrative cuts of 20% to the DCMS, Chancellor George Osborne delivered a £10 million per annum increase to the Arts Council budget up to 2019/20, reasoning that the arts are 'one of the best investments we can make'.⁹² The persistent influence of such financially oriented thinking about the social dividends of culture demonstrates that the possibilities first fully identified and pursued under Thatcher and then taken further by New Labour with its PSAs, "Targetolatory" and Creative Industries rhetoric, remain a significant part of the cultural policy discourse. This indicates that the arts have reached a markedly higher level of recognition in government thinking than they had in 1979. This positioning opens up the idea that, regardless of recessions, budget cuts and worries over the existence of the DCMS, the state supported arts will persist and continue to receive more attention than they did over 30 years ago. This means that the tensions between artistic desire for intrinsic valuation, government desire for quantifiable impact and public desire (limited as it may be) for a relevant and engaging arts sector will continue to be very much in play and very much of interest.

⁹⁰ Harvie, *Staging the UK*, p. 156

⁹¹ BBC News, "Budget 2015 Key Points: At-a-glance summary" from *BBC News: UK Politics 8th July 2015*. Found at, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-33440315>, accessed August 16.

⁹² Chris Sharratt and Jack Hutchinson, "Spending Review 2015: Cuts to DCMS but ACE budget to increase" from *A-N News 25th November 2015*. Found at, <https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/spending-review-2015-cuts-to-dcms-but-ace-budget-to-increase>. Accessed August 16.

Neoliberalism, New Labour and the Misunderstood Funding Rationale of Arts Council England.

Establishing the Global and National Context and Defining Neoliberalism

By the mid-1970s, the post-war consensus on the Keynesian economic policy of state intervention in private markets, in pursuit of stability and full employment, and the provision of expansive welfare support was being challenged due to a number of factors. After almost three decades of recovery and steady growth, economic stagnation in numerous capitalist economies undermined the viability of this approach. In the UK, the effects of this stagnation were acutely felt. The combination of the OPEC Oil Crisis of 1973 (in which Arab nations placed an embargo on their exports for five months, effectively driving up prices) and the end of post-war economic recovery and expansion led to a national recession which would have repercussions throughout the decade.

In the early stages of this contraction, there were running battles between Edward Heath's Conservative government and the National Union of Mineworkers over discrepancies between pay and inflation, leading to strikes and the curtailment of electricity use in the three-day week. Heath called an election in late February 1974 in the hope of strengthening his position against the mineworkers. The results, however, were inconclusive, with the Conservative party winning the popular vote but the Labour party securing the largest number of parliamentary seats. Heath resigned after failing to negotiate a coalition with the Liberal party and Harold Wilson's Labour party resumed office, first as a minority government and then, later, with a slim majority. Wilson had an equally fraught time navigating the situation and whilst he acquiesced to the demands of the miners (securing the return of electricity) and ostensibly oversaw the end of the recession (there was some economic growth in 1976) he was unable to significantly lower the levels of inflation and unemployment. He resigned in March 1976 and was succeeded by James Callaghan who, in turn, faced difficulties. Under his tenure the sterling entered crisis and the government was forced into adopting a range of stringent austerity measures to secure a loan from the International Monetary Fund. The decade ultimately closed with the Winter of Discontent, a series of public sector strikes in late 1978 and early 1979.

Galvanised by this stagnation and disorder, a resurgence of liberal economic thought, that critiqued the extent of governmental oversight in western capitalist economies, came to prominence in certain academic and policy circles. In the UK, Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher established the Centre for Policy Studies to '“convert the Tory party” to economic liberalism' in 1974.⁹³ In the same year, the Nobel prize for economics was awarded to long-time liberal economist, Friedrich Hayek, and, two years later, Milton Friedman, one of Hayek's students and colleagues, was also

⁹³ History of the Centre for Policy Studies, 1970s, found at <http://www.cps.org.uk/about/history/>, accessed May 2017.

awarded the prize. The thinking developed by these authors, in texts such as Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) and *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) and Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) and *Free to Choose* (with Rose Friedman, 1980), re-asserted the liberal beliefs of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. These beliefs emphasised 'freedom as the ultimate goal and the individual as the ultimate entity in society'.⁹⁴

This reassertion of historically liberal ideas was codified into policy guidelines for contemporary economies by the Washington consensus of 1975. This consensus is 'a list of eleven key policy commitments devised by American and British political economists to facilitate globalisation'.⁹⁵ These commitments included the freeing of trade, the strengthening of property rights, the lowering of workers' rights, the privatisation of state functions and the reduction of welfare services. Counter to the Keynesian, social-democratic orthodoxy, these guidelines were designed to nurture a laissez-faire approach that reduced the role of the state in economic affairs and granted the individual the power (and the responsibility) to pursue their own self-interest to the best of their ability. In practice, this consensus served as a foundational charter of neoliberalism. This term is a contentious one so, before continuing with the opening historical outline, it is useful to unpack how I understand this term and how the idea will be used in this chapter.

The primary concern when discussing neoliberalism is that there is no clearly defined understanding of it. It has been used as a label to describe the 'restoration or reconstruction of the power of economic elites', as a counter to the Keynesian orthodoxy, as a new form of imperialism and as a genuinely progressive method of wealth creation.⁹⁶ This range of different understandings means that whilst there are a few core characteristics across readings of what qualifies as neoliberal (see the commitments noted above), the configuration of them into an easily identified policy approach changes with each application. This troubling lack of clarity is compounded by the fact that neoliberalism has 'become one of the most widely used terms across many social science disciplines *except* in economics where it has disappeared'.⁹⁷ There is no broadly pro, outspoken body of work that defines itself as neoliberal in the way that other political and economic schools define themselves as Marxist or Keynesian. Thus, whilst there might be some general agreements amongst critics, the debate about what neoliberalism *is* must be recognised as ongoing. Consequently, any definitional work must be considered as "working", rather than fixed. Acknowledging this, the definition of the term that I offer here has developed through the combination of work from figures recognised (though not self-identified) as central to the discipline and some of the critical discourse

⁹⁴ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.5

⁹⁵ Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 80

⁹⁶ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 19

⁹⁷ Rajesh Venugopal, "Neoliberalism as Concept" in *Economy and Society* vol. 44 no. 2, 2015, p. 4.

that responded to this work and the policies (and consequences) it inspired. In the former case, I have drawn on the work of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, whilst in the latter I have been influenced by the thinking of Wendy Brown, David Harvey, Jen Harvie and Rajesh Venugopal. By drawing on these thinkers, I have been able to develop a functioning understanding of the term that recognises the questions and lack of clarity around the issue but avoids getting side tracked by the wider debate, which is extensive. For the purposes of this thesis, then, neoliberalism is understood as a mixture of the following material policy choices and ideological underpinnings. It describes a lack of state intervention for public benefit and the tendency to freeze or cut public subsidies as government support of any industry that could be operated privately for profitable return cannot 'validly be justified'.⁹⁸ It describes an emphasis on free trade and the deregulation of markets and social labour laws to better enable the pursuit of profit. It describes the marketisation of everything, including the sale of publicly operated organisations and the push of financial thinking into all spheres. This latter push effectively reconfigures 'human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*'.⁹⁹

Returning to our historical contextualisation, the combination of public frustration with economic turbulence and the steady development of an alternative approach culminated in the election victories of neoliberal leaders in the UK and US, with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan coming to power in 1979 and 1981, respectively. The development of these new ideas also fuelled the rise to power of more economically liberal modernisers around the world, notably Deng Xiaoping in China and Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, whose respective measures of Gaige Kaifang and Perestroika did much to stimulate their countries' economic development throughout the 1980s. In the latter case, the loosening of economic relations, combined with the discontent with the oppressive Soviet regime and a crippling military budget accelerated the decline of the USSR, with it finally collapsing in 1991.

The demise of this global superpower, with its state run economy, undermined the suggestion that there were any viable alternatives to western capitalism, configured at that point in a neoliberal fashion. Frances Fukuyama, in the tradition of utopian thinking, suggested that the collapse of Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War marked the end of history as, in the Marxist sense, the class conflict had clearly been resolved but, counter to Marx, done in a way that established liberal democratic capitalism as the ideal and final form of human society. This statement has oft been lambasted and the rise of radical Islamic terrorism, the persistence of authoritarian governance in Russia and China and an ongoing commitment to social democracy by certain governments across the world (see much of Scandinavia, for instance) demonstrate that

⁹⁸ Friedman, p. 35

⁹⁹ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press 2015), p. 31

there is still some discussion to be had about the “ideal” and irrefutable spread of western capitalist democracies. Nevertheless, at the time of Fukiyama’s comment in 1992, it is justifiable to say that the neoliberal brand of capitalism was firmly established as a political and economic model for industrial and post-industrial nations to follow and, whilst its early figureheads had left office, the influence of their ideas endured.

Looking in more detail at England during this period, I will now plot how Margaret Thatcher’s premiership influenced the evolution of the Labour party in opposition and, later, in office. The election of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government on 3rd May 1979 was the product of a significant electoral swing from Labour to Conservative and marked the beginning of a decade of radical change. Thatcher’s Conservative government broke with the dominant post-war consensus and its general agreements regarding the utility of mixed economies, the support of public services and the welfare state. Alternatively, Thatcher favoured neoliberalism as a policy framework, trusting that the freeing of markets and the limiting of state interference was the best way to increase national economic performance and so improve the welfare of British citizens. Working from this basis, she oversaw seismic social changes between 1979 and 1990, when she was ousted by her own party. These changes included the deregulation of the financial markets, the sale of many public service providers (including trains and telephone services) and the alteration of laws around unionisation to make collective industrial action more difficult.

Conservative cultural policies were similarly motivated. Between 1980 and 1990 the growth rates of the annual Arts Council budget slowed, doing little more than doubling from £70.9 million to £155.5 million. This growth was effectively a cut as inflation meant that the real term spending power of this money shrank over time. To counter this cut, the government advocated an increase in business sponsorship of the arts, suggesting that such sources of income were equally sustainable and more responsible as they did not burden the tax payer unnecessarily. The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), though founded in 1976, rose to prominence in this period and certainly facilitated stronger connections between the Arts Council’s wards and private money. By the early 1990s the funds raised by this association ‘would exceed £60,000,000 a year’.¹⁰⁰ Such figures were unprecedented a decade or two previously. However, even with this significant growth, private income could not cover the gap left by a slowed rate of public funding growth.

In consequence, the public arts sector throughout the 1980s and even into John Major’s tenure in the 1990s was, at worst, beset by several crises and, at best, pervaded by a nervousness and a feeling that artists were struggling to hold on. To provide one infamous example, on 7th February 1985 Peter Hall, then Director of the National Theatre, mounted a coffee table in the

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995) p. 339

building and declared the closure of the Cottesloe to the assembled press. Hall reasoned that with growing deficits and the Arts Council unwilling (or unable) to meet the necessary financial demand such a drastic move was necessary to save money and preserve the National Theatre, at least in some form. He delivered a barbed critique of the Arts Council, declaring that it had ‘betrayed’ his theatre, and later, alongside 47 other theatre directors, gave a vote of no confidence in the organisation.¹⁰¹

Despite these crises and protests in the cultural sector (and more widely), this more liberal economic approach of the Conservative administration was highly influential on the Labour government that succeeded them. As Tony Blair commented following Thatcher’s death, “I always thought my job was to build on some of the things that she had done rather than reverse them”.¹⁰² Accordingly, by the time of their election victory in 1997, Labour had gone through a process of economic liberalization. Most significantly, clause IV of the party charter (relating to the goal of nationalizing the means of production) was removed in 1994 as part of a move towards delivering what were loosely identified as socialist ends (social justice, citizenship and community) without socialist means. As part of this ideological shift, Labour also underwent a process of rebranding. Acknowledging the frustrations and failures of the policies of the past, and looking towards the symbolically transformative potential of the millennium, Labour pitched themselves as a ‘third way’ political party, a *New Labour* for a new Britain.¹⁰³ This pitch was powered by the active courting and adept manipulation of the press, the conscious correlation of the party’s politics with popular culture and was effectively pushed by Tony Blair, a youthful and charismatic counter point to John Major. The combined effect of these efforts was that the alternative offered by New Labour developed into a ‘powerful and persuasive narrative according to which its policies appear[ed] as the only possible set of responses to an implacable present, characterised by inexorable global forces, rather than political decisions taken within a field of contingency’.¹⁰⁴ The character of these policies acknowledged the power of, and disparities in, the current global (neoliberal) context but aimed to maximise opportunities for all. In doing so, New Labour effectively reconfigured state function as an enabler within the market place rather than as a safety net against its worst ravages (as per Old Labour) or as the cost of an inefficient society (as per Thatcherite Conservatism).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Richard Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council*, (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1998), p.347

¹⁰² BBC News Interview, April 8th 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-22073434/tony-blair-my-job-was-to-build-on-some-thatcher-policies>, accessed May 2017

¹⁰³ Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson, *Fantasy Island: Waking up to the Incredible Economic, Political and Social Illusions of the Blair Legacy*, (Lodon: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2007), p. 46.

¹⁰⁴ Timothy Bewes and Jeremy Gilbert (eds.), *Cultural Capitalism: Politics After New Labour*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2000), p. 59

¹⁰⁵ For further discussion of this idea of morphing state function, please see *Cultural Capitalism* (2005), *Interpreting British Governance* (2003) and *New Labour: a Critique* (2005), also Stephen Driver and Luke Martell’s “New Labour: Culture and Economy” in *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn* (1999).

This 'new political imaginary' of an economically progressive *and* socially considerate policy approach informed all areas of government remit, including the cultural sector.¹⁰⁶ There, New Labour's modernising efforts centred on the development of a creative industries discourse. This discourse, developed by a government task force and outlined by DCMS *Mapping Documents* (1998 & 2001), emphasised the financial impact and potential of the arts and other creative practices. It stressed that, in an increasingly post-industrial, modern economy the immaterial labour of creative professions and the exploitation of intellectual property presented an opportunity to create high-quality jobs that offered excellent growth prospects and ensured long term economic stability. Writing in *Creative Britain*, a collection of essays and speeches on the New Labour cultural vision by the Secretary of State for Culture, Chris Smith makes this economic interest explicit when he declares that his department's efforts are 'a serious attempt to do what a government legitimately can do in order to support a major economic force'.¹⁰⁷

This articulation of a serious and explicit interest in the financial potential of culture was matched by significant increases in the government's grant-in-aid to Arts Council England and the loosening of regulations on other forms of income. Between 1996/97 and 2009/10 the subsidy received from government rose from £193 million to £452.9 million. In the same period, the government altered rules on lottery support. Originally, the National Lottery, amidst spending other good causes, was to provide funds for capital developments in the arts. This initial infrastructural commitment changed over time with the effect that, by the time of New Labour's election defeat in 2010, this sizable income stream was open to a variety of different applications. These included, the creation of sustainability funds for struggling companies, support for touring programmes, and single project grants through the Grants for the Arts Scheme.

This combination of a changing lexicon and increasing funds from various sources led to the development of more caveats on spending from government and a higher level of oversight on the work of Arts Council England. The application of Public Service Agreement targets, the use of cost/benefit equation logic of HM Treasury's Greenbook, a more explicit focus by the DCMS on the industrial aspect of the "creative industries" discourse and the growing size of letters from successive DCMS ministers outlining where, and on what, certain sums of the grant-in-aid should be spent demonstrates that the publicly supported arts sector was under heightened pressure to deliver returns on government investment. As Timothy Bewes suggests, as early as the 1998 publication of *Creative Britain*, the government was pushing for a cultural ecology in which

¹⁰⁶ Bewes and Gilbert, p. 54

¹⁰⁷ Chris Smith, *Creative Britain*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) p. 5

“subjective” and “objective” success – individual integrity and economic profitability – are in *inevitable* harmony’.¹⁰⁸

Moving from detailing changes in the global economic context and the development of neoliberal ideology, through a discussion of the latter’s impact in the UK, generally, and on the arts sector, specifically, in the foregoing and immediate setting of this thesis, this cursory historical account ends at the early days of the New Labour period of governance. In doing so, it outlines some of the external pressures on the arts sector and a developing governmental approach but leaves space to consider what influence these issues had, and how organisations like the Arts Council responded to them, in practice. Before going on to explore this range of influences and responses, there are two strands of literature that need to be reviewed. The first relates to the arts sector itself, examining how the governance, sectoral research and policy discourse responded to this developing pressure from government and external forces to address their apparent financial interest. The second strand will explore the academic responses to the materials and ideas developed in the first. This second strand is particularly significant, as by identifying patterns and trends in critical thinking on this subject, this aspect of the literature review will identify where and how analysis has developed in field and, thus, open space for the argument developed in this chapter. Namely, that the use of the term neoliberal to describe the Arts Council under New Labour is critically limiting to the extent that an alternative terminology is necessary.

These limitations are grounded in the difference between neoliberalism in theory (however defined) and neoliberalism in practice. It manifests differently due to different geographical factors, fluctuating levels of industrial development and relationships, the quality of national associations with global financial bodies and differing governmental intentions. Thus, the process of ‘neoliberalization’ is never total, uniform or without contradiction and, in fact, the gap between the poles of theory and practice can be so significant that the use of a singular terminology as identifier becomes problematic.¹⁰⁹

Drawing an example from some of the figures discussed above, Reagan, Thatcher and former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet are often referenced as exemplary neoliberals and used as emblems of the shift in economic thinking that occurred during the late 1970s and 1980s¹¹⁰. However, whatever theoretical sympathy these figures may share, their policies in practice were notably different. At the extreme, Pinochet’s efforts to privatise state-owned companies and create a more economically liberal trade environment were delivered through a military coup and the torture and disappearance of thousands of citizens. Comparatively, whilst Thatcher and Reagan

¹⁰⁸ Bewes and Gilbert, p. 31

¹⁰⁹ Harvey, p. 33

¹¹⁰ As evidence of this it is instructive to consider the cover of Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, where all three leaders feature, alongside Deng Xiaoping.

utilised the apparatus of the state to break union power, they did not murder their own citizens. More moderately, Thatcher and Reagan's policies were shaped by markedly different understandings of the role of the state and the relationship of its services to the public. For instance, for all their shared desire to reform welfare services, Thatcher and Reagan had differing impacts on the provision of public healthcare. As early as 1961, Reagan was warning against the dangers of socialized medicine as the first step in a socialist takeover and, as President, he delivered \$27 billion of 'deficit reductions' to reduce this threat.¹¹¹ His administration cut money from controllable medical programmes (£2billion), Medicare and Medicaid (\$13 billion) and increased 'health-related taxes' for federal employees (\$12 billion).¹¹² Comparatively, despite a professed interest in privatising healthcare, Thatcher was unable to deliver such radical changes. The idea of altering public healthcare was so 'politically toxic' that she was forced into declaring the National Health Service (NHS) safe in Conservative hands and bailing out hospitals when original government funding levels were proven to be inadequate.¹¹³ It was only in 1990, the last year of her premiership, that she was able to introduce competition to the NHS and, even here, it was kept internal, with local health trusts "purchasing" care from competing hospitals, rather than alternative providers.

Considered side-by-side, these examples show some of the ways that the policies of Reagan, Thatcher and Pinochet challenged the idea of a uniform enactment of neoliberal theory. In their contrast, they show that, more than simply being a less than total or perfect transition from neoliberal theory to neoliberal practice, their policies abandoned key tenets of that ideology. Reagan raised taxes almost as much as he cut spending, Thatcher was forced to spend additional money on explicitly public healthcare and all three directly used the power of the state to curtail the individual freedoms of their citizens. Pinochet used death squads and torture whilst Reagan and Thatcher altered the legal rights of individuals to organise and heavily policed them when they did so.

This discussion provides one demonstration of how neoliberalism is inadequate as an accurate descriptor or as an incisive critical tool because, simply, its application papers over how policy approaches differ in different contexts. As Venugopal comments, if neoliberalism can be used to label and interrogate Pinochet, Reagan, Thatcher and, in this thesis, New Labour and Arts Council England then 'its brushstrokes thicken to the point where they lose specificity, and become unwieldy and blunt, wanting in analytical or even descriptive capacity'.¹¹⁴ I will explore this inadequacy in more detail later (beginning on pp.54-55 and then carrying onwards) but I foreground it here and state that it is this issue that I am exploiting in my examination of the funding rationale

¹¹¹ Lynn Etheredge, "Reagan, Congress and Health Spending" in *Health Affairs* vol. 2 no. 1, 1983, P. 15

¹¹² Etheredge, p. 23

¹¹³ Alan Travis, "Thatcher pushed for breakup of welfare state despite NHS pledge" in *The Guardian*, 25th November 2016, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/nov/25/margaret-thatcher-pushed-for-breakup-of-welfare-state-despite-nhs-pledge>, accessed December 2017

¹¹⁴ Venugopal, p. 4

behind public subsidy of the arts in the England. Specifically, I suggest that New Labour's approach to arts funding indicates that, though aspects of neoliberal theory might be spotted in the economic rationale and practice in this period, it is an overstatement to define the Arts Council's funding rationale in that manner and suggest that neoliberal thinking was dominant. This suggestion is not intended as an apology for neoliberalism. It is an attempt to provide a clearer understanding of the funding rationale in this period, having recognised that the currently leading one is of limited use. Going further than neoliberalism, this new understanding will acknowledge some of the more overtly financial interests and liberal aspects of the funding rationale, but it will not dismiss the significance of other aspects of that rationale that fall outside of these financial concerns. These include the interest of arts funders and policy makers in the aesthetic, spiritual, social, historic, symbolic and authenticity values of publicly supported work. This chapter will thus provide a new, more detailed and more accurate understanding of the complexity of the organisational funding rationale in a period of acute government interest. I call this more detailed alternative "Utilitarian State Capitalism" and it will be defined in more detail below once the use of neoliberalism in this context has been problematised to a sufficient degree.

Literature Review: Arts and Policy Discourse

The first significant text to consider arts practice as an economic activity and theorise the nature of the connection between the two was William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen's *The Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, published in 1966. Examining the workings of a number of orchestras in the US, Baumol and Bowen theorised that the performing arts were susceptible to a 'cost disease'.

¹¹⁵ This term describes the gap between the productivity of performing arts (which they suggested was generally stagnant) and the wider economy (which could change rapidly with developments in technology) and the consequent effect that as the productivity rose in other sectors, driving output per work hour up and connected costs down, the arts would become more and more expensive as their productivity held steady but artistic labourers had to be compensated at socially competitive rates. It was, thus, the first text to demonstrate with any quantifiable evidence that the performing arts were susceptible to moments of economic (or market) failure and has since been used to support calls for government intervention.

Thinkers from the liberal end of the economic spectrum have pointed to flaws in Baumol and Bowen's work. It was a study limited to opera in the US and so its findings may be harder to extrapolate to countries that have different relations with that art form. The economic performance of orchestras in Germany, Austria and Italy, where the tradition of opera is more embedded in the

¹¹⁵ Derrick Chong, *Arts Management*, (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 44

public consciousness may be stronger than its US equivalent, for example. Elsewhere, John Pick argues that Baumol and Bowen do not account for inflation in other wages and changing contextual phenomena that can affect prices.¹¹⁶ Thus, by working with a constant and consistent equation that the wider economy *is* more productive than the arts economy, they fail to take fair account of the market's (and entrepreneurial artist's) ability to change and adapt to problems. Finally, it has been suggested that Baumol and Bowen underestimate the potential of technological innovation within the arts that may increase productivity. Recent developments in the streaming of National Theatre and Royal Opera House productions bear this criticism out and should be duly weighted as an important counter.

Despite these criticisms, Baumol and Bowen's work remained an influential text for many years and the "market failure" argument that it made available to artists became a key point in funding debates. However, as Don Fullerton points out in his territory mapping literature review up to the early 1990s, the utilisation of thinking on market failure to justify funding is based on a potentially problematic assumption about what government should or should not do. Simply, 'government should not subsidize every good that becomes expensive or obsolete, so another argument must identify something special about art'.¹¹⁷

In the UK context, the development of this alternative argument achieved recognition in policy circles with John Myerscough's *The Economic Importance of the Arts* (1988). In stark contrast to the cost disease thesis and the inevitable market failure claims of Baumol and Bowen, the key finding of this text was that the arts sector is a vibrant and powerful economic force that creates jobs at a higher rate than the wider economy, has numerous multiplier effects on spending in other industries (such as tourism and catering) and contributes more money to GDP than the manufacturing or steel industry. The state should support the arts, then, not because of the problem of market failure and its consequences or even because of arts' other merits but because they are a highly-productive and cost-effective means of generating national income.

Working with a team of researchers and utilising a range of quantitative (census analysis) and qualitative (interviews with artists and members of the public) methods, Myerscough studied 'the arts as a form of practical activity in terms of levels of employment, income generation and patterns of economic organisation'.¹¹⁸ Focusing on Liverpool, Ipswich and Glasgow, he found that increasing public investment in the arts through regional or national initiatives would offer a cost-effective way of cutting unemployment through direct and indirect effects. Myerscough was careful in his conclusions to remind readers that his work is based on specific studies and so any national forecasts

¹¹⁶ See, John Pick, *Managing the Arts? The British Experience*, (London: Rhinegold Publishing, 1986)

¹¹⁷ Fullerton, "On justification for Public Support of the Arts" in *Journal of Cultural Economics*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1991, p. 69

¹¹⁸ John Myerscough et al., *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1988), p. 3

must be treated with caution and London, particularly, must be acknowledged as a wholly different issue. Nevertheless, his support of arts funding is and his articulation of the idea that it offers a “good buy” for the state is resoundingly clear. Significantly, this work also marks a development in rhetoric around funding, not just using economics to defend the arts (as Baumol and Bowen have been adapted to do) but to use financial reasoning to proactively make the case for increased state support.

This shift suggests a confidence that misses that some of Myerscough’s conclusions are founded on shaky methodical and perspectival ground. By Myerscough’s own admission, statistics on the arts are hard to come by and his definition of what counts as artistic practice is a restricted one that ignores many viable possibilities that might have some form of economic impact. Craft fairs, for instance, or more broadly cultural endeavours like going to the zoo are absent from Myerscough’s understanding of cultural economic activity. Further, whilst the kind of arts that Myerscough is investigating certainly have an economic dimension (as all functioning businesses do), he fails to recognise that it needn’t be a profitable one. Instead, he suggests ‘the issue is now not so much whether the arts have an economic dimension. Rather *what is the specific and distinctive contribution the arts can make?*’¹¹⁹ The affirmative foundation of this question and the consequent interest in maximising profitable impact indicates the underlying theoretical position that Myerscough is working from. He is convinced that the arts are profitable and is writing to assure and win over readers. This is not to suggest that Myerscough is lying about the financial clout of the arts, but it is to suggest that in support of his view, he presents his work in a way that skews the wider picture. As a former Arts Council officer stated, Myerscough (like others in the 1980s) was ‘speaking to the government in the only language it understands’.¹²⁰ Consequently, any other benefits that might be produced by the arts may be lost by the perspective offered by his work. Pleasure, personal development and cultural cohesion, for instance, are all issues underplayed by this dominant economic vocabulary.

Despite these internal problems and some of the criticisms levelled at the work by ideological opponents (see Sawers *Should the Taxpayer Support the Arts* (1992) for a lucid reading of some potential problems of state support), Myerscough’s *Economic Importance* resonated with governmental interest in the profitability of UK plc, increasing pressure upon the arts to work as businesses, and on the ability of the arts to provide an effective means of urban regeneration in an increasingly post-industrial nation.¹²¹ The significance of this was that, counter to Fullerton’s

¹¹⁹ Myerscough et al., p. 2

¹²⁰ Pick, p. 71

¹²¹ In a neat coincidence, two years following the publication of the book, Glasgow, one of Myerscough’s case studies, was awarded status as the first European City of Culture, a title designed to showcase the city’s cultural appeal and so inspire more economic activity. See, <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/insight-glasgow-city-of-culture-25-years-on-1-3899379> for a contemporary reflection.

suggestion, Myerscough did not find something special about the arts themselves that was worthy of subsidising. Instead, by assessing and describing the arts in a way that the government could more easily understand, the enduring legacy of Myerscough's work is that it helped strengthen the call for arts funding but also pitched the debate around the issue further towards quantifiable measures and justifications. In and of itself, this new pitch need not necessarily be a bad thing. Indeed, the realisation of the economic potential of the arts and the possibility for job creation was something that New Labour would later recognise as one of the four main aims of government intervention. Equally, ensuring that the distribution of public money has a quantifiably positive impact is an entirely reasonable and responsible approach to funding. However, Myerscough's work contributed to the development of an instrumental rhetoric (that the arts were good *for* something) that would help nudge the policy agenda towards a particular trajectory and, ultimately, lead to frustrations, criticisms and backlash from the arts community.

Moving into the 1990s, 'the first investigation which made explicit reference to the new policy agenda of the instrumental power of the arts was undertaken by Comedia in 1993 and supported by the Arts Council. It resulted in a discussion document *The Social Impact of the Arts*. The document identified a consensus across the arts funding system for taking forward an arts impact research agenda'.¹²² In the economic field, this consensus led to the development of a number of research publications, each one helping to fill the statistical gaps that Myerscough identified *and* further strengthening his reading of the arts as an economic activity. For instance, see O'Brien and Feist's *Employment in the arts and cultural industries; an analysis of the 1991 Census* (1995), Casey, Dunlop and Selwood's *Culture as Commodity* (1995) and Pratt's *The Cultural Industries Sector: its definition and character from secondary sources on employment and trade, Britain 1984-91* (1997). An effect of this developing discourse was that, by 1997, the arts, as part of the recently identified creative industries sector, had become recognised by 'Supranational organisations such as the European Commission, the World Bank, national and local government, as a major force in the fast-changing global economy'.¹²³

This more prominent positioning was reflected and supported in the UK by a range of publications written or commissioned by the New Labour government. As noted above, the Culture Secretary used many of his speeches and writings to push a creative discourse in which profitable economic performance and subjective satisfaction were ideally and inevitably interlinked. These personal assertions were backed by the deployment of a Creative Industries Task Force and the development of two *Creative Industries Mapping Documents*, appearing in 1998 and 2001, respectively. These sought to identify 'those industries which have their origin in individual

¹²² Michelle Reeves, *Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review*, (London: Arts Council England, 2002), p. 15

¹²³ Reeves, p. 9

creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'.¹²⁴ They represented the 'first ever attempt to measure the economic contribution of these industries to the UK, and to identify the opportunities and threats they faced'.¹²⁵ Positively, this reconnoitring of the territory helped centre cultural practice in government attention, explicitly showcasing 'in policy terms, the importance of being able to evaluate economic impact' and thereby providing arts organisations with the language and rhetoric to strengthen arguments for funding increases.¹²⁶ In the case of theatre, the Boyden report of 2001 outlined the negative state of regional theatres, identifying many as insolvent and suggesting that the ecology is in near terminal decline after decades of neglect. From this basis, the report secured an additional £25 million for theatre by effectively articulating the value for money that a more vibrant, thriving theatre ecology would offer. Regional theatres give training opportunities for all in the sector, creating job prospects in and of themselves and, also, acting as a testing ground for performers and ideas that could transfer to the larger, metropolitan stages. Moreover, a wide-ranging and thriving theatre ecology could generate larger audience spend, contribute to making regional centres better places to live and work and lead to the creation of high-quality art, too. All of this provides compelling evidence that effective arts funding would be a better public-spend than the unemployment benefits that would be distributed otherwise.

However, the shift from cultural to creative discourse expanded the parameters of the term in a way that can be criticised as a potentially cynical move that allowed the DCMS to incorporate economically strong industries (such as software development) within its portfolio to counter the economic weaknesses of others (such as opera). It could thus make a stronger case to government during spending reviews that enabled more funding for all its supported forms but it might also be read as a disingenuous manoeuvre that undermined governmental support of culture for more strictly cultural values: intellectual stimulation, emotional growth, aesthetic pleasure. Such a singular, critical reading is likely overstating the case; throughout *Creative Britain* Smith pushes a range of other values alongside the economic, with public access, aesthetic excellence and the educational potential of creative work all featuring prominently in his field of interest. Equally, those at the Arts Council acknowledge that whilst they could 'recognise the trend' of increasing economic pressure throughout the New Labour period it was not the only dividend that the Arts Council was interested in.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the increasing pressure on the DCMS and, consequently, its non-departmental public bodies (including the Arts Council) to think and work economically has been commented on by Smith himself: 'The Treasury won't be interested in the intrinsic merits of

¹²⁴ Creative Industries Task Force, *Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001*, (London: DCMS. 2001), p. 5

¹²⁵ Creative Industries Task Force, p. 4

¹²⁶ Dominic Shellard, *Economic Impact Study of UK Theatre*, (London: Arts Council England, 2004), p. 8

¹²⁷ Interview with David Micklem, see Appendix, p. 229

nurturing beauty or fostering poetry or even “enhancing the quality of life”.¹²⁸ This indicates that whilst cultural values may not have been dismissed by New Labour they were, more accurately, rendered secondary to an overarching economic concern.

Given the *Mapping Document*’s role in plotting the territory and providing (at the time) one of the most detailed descriptions of the economic contribution of the sector, it can be recognised as a text of enduring significance and, in consideration alongside Myerscough’s work, can be read as a noteworthy development of his economic argument. In effect, after the *Mapping Documents*, the arts in the UK, subsumed under the creative banner, are primarily recognised (and encouraged) by government as industries that, more than simply offering a novel approach to urban regeneration or a boost to tourism (as primarily understood in the 1980s), have the economic clout to fuel post-millennial growth, the creation of more attractive jobs and the joint delivery of financial dividends and enriching lifestyles.

To demonstrate this clout in more detail and gain a greater understanding of the economic dimension of the arts, particularly theatre, within the newly branded creative world, Arts Council England commissioned Professor Dominic Shellard to conduct an economic impact study in 2001 (published in 2004). Going further than the Wyndham report of 1998, which focused exclusively on West End theatres, Shellard assessed the economic performance of 492 organisations outside of London and 49 West End theatres. He found that the theatre sector generated £2.6 billion of economic impact, understood as the total of ticket sales combined with ‘additional visitor spend’ (the cost paid by the public for food, travel, childcare).¹²⁹ This is an impressive figure but it belies a problematic split. Of the 541 theatres considered, most of the economic impact came from West End venues. The 49 London theatres (just over 9% of the total sample) account for £1.6 billion (around 57% of total economic impact), meaning that the other 492 theatres surveyed (91% of total sample) provided the remaining £1.1 billion (43% of total economic impact).

This disparity, though perhaps understandable given years of regional underfunding and accusations of metropolitan bias, presented a challenge for the emergent creative industries discourse and the national scope of its claims. By these measures, though the economic impact of theatre nationwide is not unsubstantial (calculated at £6,125 per theatre per day), the motor of the industry is London (calculated at £89,460 per theatre per day), with any given metropolitan venue having as much impact on an average day as almost 15 venues outside of the city. Consequently, whilst Shellard claims that regional venues are ‘hugely important to the national economy’, he acknowledges that this disparity needs to be explored further and a more detailed “mapping”

¹²⁸ Chris Smith, *Valuing Culture: A Speech by the Director of the CLORE Programme for Cultural Leadership*, found at <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/File/VACUCSmith.pdf>, accessed April 2017, p. 1

¹²⁹ Shellard, p. 5

carried out if a stronger case is to be made in economic terms.¹³⁰ This need is rendered explicit by his admission of the ‘relative scarcity of economic impact studies of local, regional or national theatrical activity’.¹³¹ Tellingly, he only offers five noteworthy examples of preceding or contemporary work.¹³² More worryingly, given this acknowledgement of a lack of economic data and the call for more, the *Theatre Assessment* of 2009 admits that ‘there has been no assessment of the economic impact of theatre since’ Shellard’s 2004 publication.¹³³ This indicates that despite Shellard’s advice and increased attention from government, the investigation into the economic dimension of the arts, in this case theatre, established itself with a strong early showing and then gradually dissipated. As one Arts Council officer stated in interview for this thesis ‘The argument’s been made clear. The economic studies have been done and we still live on that “£2 for every £1 invested”’.¹³⁴

The acknowledgement of a gap in research and the parallel idea of having won the argument with the government at an early stage of their administration offers a useful moment to reflect on trajectory of economic thinking in the literature of the arts sector under New Labour. It is evident that there was a growing interest in the ability of the arts to make money, with a number of *Mapping Documents* and studies presenting some positive conclusions and opening up language and argumentative strands to impress policy makers and those in control of funding. It is also clear that this interest predated New Labour, but that it was taken up and expanded by them as part of their own modernising political rhetoric. However, the suggestion that the arts (as part of the creative industries) offered a silver bullet solution to the challenge of growing the post-industrial, millennial economy only goes so far on evidence. Ironically, given New Labour’s penchant for evidence-based policy making, the literature review has detailed many strong examples but the *consistent and thorough demonstration* of arts’ (in this case theatres’) economic impact has been shown to be lacking, with even key authors in the tradition (including Myerscough, Smith and Shellard) citing the challenge of the lack of accurate statistics and the need for more investigation if the case is to be driven forward. The effect of this is to suggest that, despite increasing emphasis in governmental and organisational literature, the demonstration of arts’ economic clout throughout this period was sporadic, with headline successes veiling a more complicated and less impressive picture. That the economic case (and the demand to deliver it) remained a key part of arts policy throughout the New Labour government and after, given Shellard’s shaky demonstration, raises the question of why and

¹³⁰ Shellard, p. 5

¹³¹ Shellard, p. 8

¹³² See, *Theatre Royal Norwich: Annual Survey* (2001/2002), *Cambridge Arts Theatre: Economic Impact Study* (1998-2000), *Cambridge Arts Theatre: Economic Impact Study* (2000-2001), *Chichester Festival Theatre: Economic Impact Study* (2000) and *The Economic and Social Impact of Theatre in Northern Ireland* (2003)

¹³³ Arts Council England, *Theatre Assessment 2009*, (London: ACE, 2009), P. 73

¹³⁴ Interview with Mark Hollander, see *Appendix*, p. 255

prompts us to consider the nature of the relationship between government, the arts sector and money.

Literature Review: Academic Responses to the Arts and Policy Discourse

The consideration of this relationship is not a new endeavour in academic discourse. As early as the 1940s, the first Arts Council Chair, John Maynard Keynes wrote of the worry that the recently established state oversight would lead to the inevitable and harmful economisation of the arts. Keynes feared that this new relationship would entrench the philistine idea that only those things that bring financial returns are worth paying for. This, in his view, was ‘the most dreadful heresy, perhaps, which has ever gained the ear of a civilised people’.¹³⁵ In such a climate, the greater values of the arts would be lost to such an extent that something as striking as The Hanging Gardens of Babylon would never be made again as, simply, what they offer cannot be financially quantified. This, he reasons, would be a loss for humanity. Though his example is too striking for effective comparison here, the sentiment of a state-led economisation of the arts and its consequences is certainly one picked up by thinkers investigating the development of the relationship between culture and economics at the turn of the twenty-first century

The cultural economist David Throsby takes value as his focus in *Economics and Culture* (2001). This term, he suggests, describes an underlying component in both the cultural and economic sphere, though in each case the word has different connotations.

Recently, policy makers and researchers have placed too much emphasis on the industrial value of culture and the creative industries, its profitable, economic dimension. This is to the detriment of a more rounded appreciation of that sector which acknowledges the aesthetic or more broadly social values that it can generate. Throsby, in a warning against singular, totalising explanations, suggests that economists and policy makers have been ‘deluding themselves if they claim that economics can encompass cultural value entirely within its ambit and that the methods of economic assessment are capable of capturing all relevant aspect of cultural value in their net’.¹³⁶ His alternative, spiralling off ideas developed by Pierre Bourdieu, is to propose that ‘Cultural Value’ be used as a means of assessment.¹³⁷ This hybrid terminology originates from the cultural discourse and primarily considers such qualities as a work’s aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical, symbolic and authenticity values but from this base, Throsby suggests that, ‘it might be possible to borrow from economic modes of

¹³⁵ John Maynard Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. 28: *Social Political and Literary Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 342

¹³⁶ David Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 41

¹³⁷ Throsby, p. 26

thought as one way of modelling' the best way to maximise their support and impact of these qualities.¹³⁸

The impact of Throsby's theorisation of an alternative approach to the economic turn in the UK cultural sector is debatable. Certainly, his exploration of the possibility of alternative value structures correlates with a growing trend throughout the later years of the New Labour administration. Indeed, a range of appointments by the government and the Arts Council saw academics, cultural workers and even Secretaries of State begin to reflect on the role of different forms of value in the policy process and funding rationale.¹³⁹ Even so, any direct influence on the New Labour cultural policy formulation process and Arts Council funding decisions is hard to evidence. Regardless of this question of real impact, by articulating this wariness of economic language, thought and measurement, particularly during a period when such language was supposed to be, if not wholly dominant, then certainly highly prominent, Throsby offers solid ideas with which to further analyse the role of economics in the funding rationale of the Arts Council under New Labour. For this chapter specifically, Throsby's outline of the idea that economic value is one of six other values that can be connected with cultural value and that this mixture should (or perhaps does) inform funding decisions has been particularly influential on my thinking.

To most effectively apply these ideas in a way that helps move the understandings of this area of cultural policy research forward it is necessary to establish where the discussion of the nature of the funding rationale in the New Labour context is now. Many histories of the Arts Council have been written since its foundation. In the introduction to this thesis, I offered a brief review of some of the historic texts that helped shape the contextual framework of my thinking. I will now introduce three significant recent additions to the cannon of Arts Council historical narratives and analysis that, in combination, showcase where the dominant understanding of the funding rationale currently is.

Jen Harvie's *Fair Play: Arts Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013) tracks 'roughly from the beginning of New Labour's term to the [then] present, during the term of the Conservative-led coalition government that took power in 2010'. She argues that by the time of publication the dominant driver of arts funding policy had become economic.¹⁴⁰ Specifically, that the arts were assessed and expected to perform in accordance with a neoliberal capitalist ideology. She suggests that this had been the case since the 'shifts in UK cultural policy from the New Labour era' that encouraged (or forced, as Harvie would have it) artists to become more entrepreneurial, efficient

¹³⁸ Throsby, p. 26

¹³⁹ For strong examples of this expanding discourse see, John Holden's *Capturing Cultural Value: How culture has become a tool of government policy* (2004), Tessa Jowell's *Government and the Value of Culture* (2004) and Dave O'Brien's *Measuring the Value of Culture: A report to the Department for Culture Media and Sport* (2010). These materials will be discussed in detail in the later chapter on the Arts Council's understanding and pursuit of excellence in this period.

¹⁴⁰ Harvie, p. 11

and demonstrative of their social and economic impact.¹⁴¹ In its most recent iteration, under David Cameron's government, this economic rhetoric has led to cuts to state support, the increased emphasis on private philanthropy and the encouragement of artists to become increasingly adaptable, entrepreneurial agents in a mixed market place. The consequences of this are potentially deeply damaging. These moves risk 'sweating' artists under financial pressure (leading to free labour and long hours), losing sight of some of the wider benefits of the arts (their social, emotional and educational qualities), opening up the possibility of an entertaining but increasingly homogeneous, globalised sector and, finally, giving the already privileged more control and privilege (tax breaks are offered to the wealthy on donations of *their* choosing).¹⁴²

It is evident from the focus, tone and argumentation of her writing that Harvie is avowedly critical of the current approach to cultural economics in the state supported sector. However, this stance does not stop her from assessing, in each chapter, the possible benefits to artists of this approach. For instance, she reasons that entrepreneurialism can lead to greater financial resilience, that corporate support does not necessarily lead to bad art and that the diversification of income streams means that artists may be saved from the limiting possibility of being tied to one backer. Equally, she acknowledges that some level of profitable turnover is both necessary and beneficial at an individual and social level. Consequently, it can be summarised that Harvie is not arguing for a *complete* socio-economic change. More accurately, she is identifying moments of extremity and through her analysis asking for a reconsideration and alteration of these fringe ideas that have become normalised over time. By working in this way, Harvie offers a well-plotted and rich critique of some of the recent and more dated developments in government policy that she claims have culminated in the dominance of an extreme, neoliberal approach to the economic dimension of cultural policy and, by extension, the funding rationale of Arts Council England.

Robert Hewison is one of the UK's foremost cultural historians and writers. He has published a range of work on John Ruskin, British culture in the 1960s and 1970s, and the history and impact of state support of the arts and culture. These latter texts have been delivered from a position as commentator - see *Culture and Consensus: England, art and politics since 1940* (1996), *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (1987) – and also as a contributing voice to the research and policy formulation of the sector - see "Towards 2010: new times, new challenges for the arts" (an essay from the Arts Council *Annual Review 2000*), *The Right to Art: Making Aspirations Reality* (with John Holden, 2004) and *The Cultural Leadership Handbook* (with John Holden, 2011). Though demonstrating many points of connection, this vein of Hewison's work does not represent an entirely positive relationship with the leading UK arts funding body and in his most recent

¹⁴¹ Harvie, p. 23

¹⁴² Harvie, p. 73

publication, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* (2014), Hewison develops a critical account of the efforts of the New Labour government and their successors in the coalition.

This critique is a multi-faceted investigation into the complexities that existed within what Tony Blair called the 'Golden Age' of culture, with the central thesis of the text suggesting that despite certain, well-trumpeted successes, the cultural policy of New Labour was not as effective as it may seem.¹⁴³ With regard to the access agenda, Hewison suggests that the rise of managerialism and the dominance of output measures in the funding and assessment process had seen 'narrow contractual agreement[s...] substituted for professional judgement and expertise', with the effect that ostensibly impressive gains in a given area (youth engagement, for instance) masked a wider lack of understanding and effective long term planning.¹⁴⁴ In connection to the aim of excellence, his analysis is even more scathing, suggesting that New Labour and the Arts Council ducked the aesthetic question entirely, favouring economic and social indicators as guides for the assessment and funding of work, to the inevitable detriment of its more intrinsic qualities. In the case of economics, he suggests that there has been an overbearing development of neoliberal thought in the funding rationale and that this has had a harmful effect on the expectations of supported arts and cultural practices, to the extent that the Arts Council's commitment to its other agendas of access and quality have become hollowed out phrases that mask a pervasive financial interest. This latter focus merits further exploration here.

From the outset of his text, Hewison dismisses the idealistic claims of the socially transformative potential of the arts supported by New Labour's policy as 'rhetoric about a new dawn of national renewal' that masked the continuing development of the economic agenda of the outgoing Conservative administration.¹⁴⁵ Citing the ever-present pressure of the Treasury Green Book's cost/benefit equation, the tyrannous freedom of the marketplace to sell or starve and the largescale implementation of target setting and audit measures, Hewison suggests that neoliberalism was the defining funding rationale of the period. Accordingly, it drew the arts into a style of governance that sought to maximise financial returns in a way that rendered other agendas and policy drivers subservient. As Hewison suggests, Blair's New Labour considered the UK as a stakeholder society and whilst there may have been social dividends provided by the state within this conception, these were contingent on the willingness of people and organisations to work. In a similar fashion to the historical development of New Labour unpacked above, the services of the state (including the Arts Council in this reading) are pitched by Hewison as an enabler for those willing to contribute rather than as a safety net for those who can't. It is this way that Hewison

¹⁴³ Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*, (London: Verso, 2014), p. 1

¹⁴⁴ Hewison, p. 69

¹⁴⁵ Hewison, p. 3

suggests that the arts funding rationale has undergone a process of neoliberalisation. The establishment of the ethos of work or else and the prioritisation of financial returns has come at the expense of more social democratic possibilities and, going a step further than the wary analysis of Keynes and Throsby, Hewison is unequivocal in outlining the negative consequences of this shift for the arts and society. 'Neoliberalism has replaced collective identity with that of the atomized individual – a seeker of maximum utility ruled by economic self-interest. This is a false understanding of human nature that leaves individuals with no meaningful relationships with each other except a transactional one'.¹⁴⁶

In contrast to this suggestion of other agendas being empty rhetoric to mask an overbearing, neoliberal approach, Liz Tomlin suggests that the social inclusion agenda was 'hugely significant in shaping arts policy' and funding choices.¹⁴⁷ Writing in the contextualising chapters to her edited volume on *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014* which offers detailed readings of six prominent theatre organisations, she concedes that this is not to ignore the 'creep of the market into traditionally non-market spheres' of New Labour's neoliberally tinged third-way politics but it is to point out that New Labour's cultural policy and the funding rationale of the Arts Council it supported was more wide-ranging than "neoliberal above all", as a reading of Hewison would suggest.¹⁴⁸ Explicitly, she argues that the economic agenda was parallel rather than dominant to other agendas (aesthetic, instrumental) or that, at least, those other agendas were not wholly subservient or for show.

In making this distinction, Tomlin develops a less critical stance than Hewison and encourages us to recognise that the challenge of understanding New Labour's cultural policy lies in the attempt to reconcile the influence of two radically different agendas, each upon the other. On the one hand, the growing marketisation of state functions in a post-Soviet world that increasingly favoured a radical form of capitalism and, on the other, the similarly growing investment in the cultural infrastructure in pursuit of social democratic goals such as crime reduction, education, diversity and public outreach. In doing so, she offers new and fertile pathways that challenge the potentially totalising economic narrative pushed by Hewison and invites a more varied consideration of the government's cultural policy and its impact on the funding rationale of the state supported arts sector.

To further demonstrate the appeal and need for these new pathways it is useful to turn to a vein of literature that further questions neoliberalism. The following texts do not challenge it for its harmful real-world effects (as Klein's *No Logo* (2002) and Harvie's *Fair Play* (2013) do) nor do they

¹⁴⁶ Hewison, p. 226

¹⁴⁷ Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 4

¹⁴⁸ Tomlin, p. 6

challenge it as an incoherent economic ideology in theory (see Harvie's *Fair Play* (2013) and Harvey's *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005)). Rather, they critique its efficacy as a conceptual label, arguing that though it may be possible in a broad application to use the term to describe a form of radical capitalism, it is too often used without consideration of the specificity of the elements that constitute the terminology and the elements of the context upon which it is being grafted to help better explain. In this case, whilst elements of the context and cultural policy of the New Labour government tally with certain neoliberal qualities they do not tally with all, or even most, of them. Consequently, the use of neoliberalism as a means of labelling creates an analytical framework that lacks nuance and so retards the development of accurate and detailed readings and, in turn, slows the timely theorisation of effective alternatives. By highlighting this vein of research and its problems, and by doing so alongside the reading of Tomlin, the final part of this literature review will demonstrate that, rather than simply opening a door to something interesting, the pathways suggested by her work must be taken if improved understandings of cultural policy in the UK context are to be effectively developed.

David Hesmondhalgh and his colleagues asked, "Were New Labour's cultural policies neoliberal?" in a provocative 2014 article that serves as both an effective introduction into a developing field of economic study (the push back against neoliberalism as a critical concept) and as an effective primer for the consideration of the issue in this context, particularly. Explicitly, Hesmondhalgh's analysis makes clear why it is understandable that the term neoliberalism is applied so regularly to New Labour's cultural policy but why this application is flawed. Drawing on the works of Watkins and Hall, the authors suggest that the term and the idea is something of a ruse.¹⁴⁹ Neoliberalism is a 'dismal epithet.... imprecise and overused. Hall writes that 'the term lumps together too many things to merit a single identity: it is reductive, sacrificing attention to internal complexities and geohistorical specificity'.¹⁵⁰ In the context of English arts funding, it 'draws attention, via very broad brushstrokes, to the general policy environment in which Labour was operating, one in which public investment needed to be defended more than ever against attack, and where it also needed to be shown to be effective on economic grounds. But the term fails to provide adequate analytical grasp of the distinct ways in which cultural policy was changing' that did not fully represent or respond to the demands of these pervasive neoliberal values.¹⁵¹ At a fundamental level, it is instructive to consider the points gathered together in the Washington consensus and consider how few apply to the recent cultural policy period.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ See Susan Hall "The Neoliberal Revolution" in *Cultural Studies* Vol. 25, no. 6 (2011) and Susan Watkins, "Shifting Sands" in *New Left Review* no. 61 (2010)

¹⁵⁰ David Hesmondhalgh et al, "Were New Labour's cultural policies neo-liberal?" in *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 25 issue 1, p. 98

¹⁵¹ Hesmondhalgh et al, p. 110

¹⁵² See Harvie, p. 35 of this thesis for a description or p. 80 of Harvie's *Fair Play* for a complete list.

Given that this terminology enables a papering over the discrepancy between economic context and shifting policy approach, then, it is understandable that, in the same period, Hewison can talk of the managerialist development of Conservative policies and Tomlin can talk of a marketised social democracy as neoliberally tinged approaches, for example, without risking claims of inconsistency or paradox. Simply, within the space created by the general idea of neoliberalism (that pursuit of profit is a central goal and that a marketised, pro-business ethos is pervasive and inescapable) each of these interpretations can stand.¹⁵³ However, Hesmondhalgh rightly argues, such readings are flawed and that it is an over-extension to suggest with any specificity or confidence that government action can therefore be characterised as neoliberal also. To be clear, there may be aspects of New Labour's cultural policy which were neoliberal but the problem with such a totalising branding is that it marginalises evident differences between theory and practice (the hugely increased levels of public investment), interprets similarities in particular ways (you can run an arts organisation as an efficient business without being neoliberal) and, in an ironic parallel with Marxist theory, strips individuals of agency within social frameworks (artists needn't sacrifice the aesthetic or social potential of their work for the sake of profitability nor must they become brainwashed by one dimensional marketised thoughts). The ultimate effect of this is to provide an easy to apply and, ostensibly, clear and direct terminology that actually undermines nuanced interpretations and propagates, not wholly inaccurate, but certainly misleading readings.

A useful counter to the limitations of neoliberalism as an explanatory concept is offered by Eric Shaw in his reflective 2007 publication *Losing Labour's Soul? Working through a series of case studies*, Shaw explores New Labour's articulation of longstanding Labour values (social democracy and justice), prominent policy focuses of that government (education) and missteps and areas of criticism (the Private Finance Initiative). He thus offers an analysis of New Labour in government that positions them within the tradition of party, the national context and the global scene. In the latter part of the book, he offers detailed sketches on the dynamics of the party, unpacking the role and power of agents in an economic context and exploring how each informs the action or design of the other. He suggests that there are two major schools of thought on contemporary economic organisation: globalisation (neoliberalism in this case) or a "varieties of capitalism" approach.

'Globalisation designates a global political economy characterised by the internationalisation of production, free trade, massive and free-flowing capital movements and the general deregulation of economic and financial relations'.¹⁵⁴ In line with this thought, Shaw suggests that national governments are stripped of power as national borders and laws take on less significance to international businesses. This has the effect that governments, particularly those with pretences of

¹⁵³ See the global turn described in the history above.

¹⁵⁴ Shaw, p. 142

social democracy, may become forced into a position of accommodation, adaptation or active embrace of these mobile and competitive global organisations to secure tax revenues. To varying degrees, this is the approach of the New Labour government suggested in the analyses of cultural policy offered by Hewison and Tomlin.

As an alternative, Shaw outlines the workings of the “varieties of capitalism” theory which

‘rejects the thesis that all western states are being impelled onto a convergent course. It draws attention to the role that political-economic institutions play in coordinating the behaviour of economic agents, the relationship and the institutions of a given country and the tight linkage between those institutions and particular patterns of economic growth’.¹⁵⁵

Shaw suggests that the organising principles behind the behaviours of these political-economic institutions can be described as either liberal market economies or coordinated market economies, with each having corresponding welfare state regimes; the liberal and the social democratic. In either case, what dictates action is not context (which informs action) but ‘systemic logic’.¹⁵⁶ What do people and organisations think is right, what do they want to do in accordance with their beliefs, what results are they trying to deliver through bodies like the DCMS, for instance?

Applying this “varieties of capitalism” thinking to this thesis, New Labour may have inherited a neoliberal context, but they took action in accordance with ideals that, though developed over time and in response to that context, were not synonymous with it. Thus, in their election materials and cultural policies they deployed and celebrated certain business-savvy, market-friendly ideas but also increased spending, expanded the understandings of diversity and at-risk groups, and consistently pushed the anti-Thatcherite message of the significance of socio-cultural bonds.¹⁵⁷ New Labour’s third-way mixture of neoliberalism and social democracy, thus, offered a *new* political imaginary and that is why it was electorally successful. It was not the inevitable accommodation of a globalised economic system, but a value and agent driven development of policy in response to the context in which that system operated.

Shaw’s unpacking of this “varieties of capitalism” argument is useful in this analysis as it demonstrates how government policy can engage with a capitalist structure without being overwhelmed by that structure and inaccurately branded as inevitably or wholly neoliberal. It thus provides a way of assessing the funding rationale of the Arts Council under New Labour that, though

¹⁵⁵ Shaw, p. 143

¹⁵⁶ Shaw, p. 143

¹⁵⁷ Writing in *Creative Britain*, p. 15, Smith was explicit about the significance of this sociality to New Labour’s success. ‘One of the reasons for New Labour’s election victory on May 1 1997 was surely a very simple realisation by the British people, after eighteen years of a contrary doctrine, that there *is* such thing as society’

acknowledging its more financially liberal leanings, recognises the influence of other agendas and values on the policy process, as theorised by Throsby. In doing so, Shaw supports a fruitful exploration of the pathway between the ostensibly hard to reconcile narratives of extreme liberal economics and social democratic imperatives, as highlighted by Tomlin. Thus, by operating from the base provided by the amalgamation of these three thinkers, this chapter will be able to demonstrate that despite the dominant interpretation of organisational and policy materials as indicating an increasing neoliberal turn in the funding rationale, the cultural economics of the Arts Council under New Labour can most accurately be described in another way. This other way, utilising the variety allowed by Shaw's work, will be what I term Utilitarian State Capitalism.

Troubling the Public-Facing Narrative.

Before outlining this Utilitarian State Capitalist approach it is important to establish in greater detail how the materials in the policy discourse (sketched in the first strand of the literature review) encouraged a neoliberal interpretation and, then, how this interpretation can be effectively troubled. As discussed above, from the late 1990s onwards, the commonly presented and perceived understanding of the Arts Council was that it was an increasingly marketised organisation, under pressure from government to maximise the economic impact and financial returns of the arts ahead of other values. One of the earliest and clearest reasons for this interpretation can be found in Smith's *Creative Britain*, which emphasised economic impact as one of the four key goals of New Labour's cultural policy and suggested that not only is it right for government to encourage the economic potential of the arts but in a de-industrialised, future-facing, modern Britain it was essential. In support of this effort, the government commissioned the creation of *Creative Industries Mapping Documents* in 1998 and 2001 to better understand the territory in which the arts operated and what economic impact they had. They also connected all public spending decisions to Treasury Greenbook cost/benefit guidelines to ensure the efficient distribution of state resources. Finally, in direct connection with the Arts Council, they appointed Gerry Robinson, the former head of Granada television and a proven businessman, as Chair. Alongside these practical measures there was also an increased governmental emphasis on the importance of corporate philanthropy, the role of the lottery and the need for creative organisations to be flexible and efficient in a mixed-economy market place.

This combination of efforts showcase the growing interest of an economically conscious government that, simultaneously, became more engaged and directive with regard to delivering financial results on public investment whilst also attempting to re-orient the role of public provision, encouraging the opening up of other sources of income and inviting arts organisations to think in

more independent, business-like terms. In testament to the force of the financial turn started under Smith, his successor as Secretary of State for Culture, Tessa Jowell, celebrated the fact that by 2006 'after years of ideological opposition to the means of wealth creation in this country, New Labour has a relationship with business'.¹⁵⁸

The impact of this evident governmental turn on the Arts Council's funding rationale can be assessed in a number of ways, one of which is to look at how the organisation described their work and efforts via their annual reviews. Every year 'The Arts Council of England as a publicly accountable body, publishes an annual report and accounts to parliament and the general public with an overview of the year's work'.¹⁵⁹ These reports open with comments from the Chair and Chief Executive (formerly Secretary General), with the former usually addressing the wider social, political and cultural context and the role of the arts within them, and the latter generally discussing the administrative issues that the organisation faces. Each document also contains considerations of finishing or continuing initiatives, outlines some artistic highlights from the last year and details grant-in-aid and lottery account information. Beyond these necessities, the selection and formatting of content in each review is flexible. Between 1996/97 and 2007/08 the method of presenting material to the reader went through a variety of different iterations. By tracking such changes, this discourse analysis of annual reviews will illuminate how the ongoing, public-facing narrative detailing the funding rationale of the organisation changed throughout the New Labour administration. In doing so, it will provide a way of charting the impact of a larger governmental interest in financial performance on a leading NDPB and so provide insight into how and when the tendency towards neoliberal interpretation of Arts Council ethos was made possible.

In his opening comments for the *Annual Report 1996/97*, former Chair Lord Gowrie presents the economic role and interest of the Arts Council in terms lifted from the cultural economic discourse of the 1980s; 'Whoever would have thought that the Arts Council would in the 1990s be a major economic force in the regeneration of cities? Or that jobs related to the arts should be growing so rapidly'?¹⁶⁰ As an outgoing Conservative appointee (indeed, Gowrie served as an Arts Minister under Thatcher prior to his selection as Chair), such emphasis on urban regeneration and job growth is not surprising and certainly represents the established, pre-New Labour territory of government interest and Arts Council funding concerns.

In the following year things start to change. The 1997/98 report is opened by Gerry Robinson, a new appointment to Chair by a new government who outlined a new way of operating, emblematic of the 'different climate and new opportunities' that the change of administration and

¹⁵⁸ Shaw, p. 197

¹⁵⁹ The Arts Council of England, *Developing, Sustaining and Promoting the Arts in England: Annual Report 1998*, (London: ACE, 1999), p. 3

¹⁶⁰ The Arts Council of England, *The Arts Council of England Third Annual Report and Accounts 1996/97*, (London: ACE, 1997), p. 5

the approach of the millennium brought.¹⁶¹ This new approach recognised that, whilst new, increased funds had been released and were rectifying long standing problems, this growth was not intended as a backstop for complacent organisations. Robinson suggests,

‘we don’t want to create dependencies: a leg up from the Arts Council will not mean a free ride for life. Good management is not the enemy of good art; nor is popularity a sign of bad art. On the contrary, growing audiences and financial viability should be recognised as important goals for arts companies and indicators of their success. The Arts Council will foster success and reward it’.¹⁶²

Pitched in this way by the leader of the organisation, and supported by Chief Executive Peter Hewitt, who explicitly welcomed the government priorities that drove this radical change, the funding rationale of the organisation outlined here can be read as pump-priming. Indeed, the expectations of the Arts Council towards its supported organisations are that, for the funds provided, they make work that is financially successful, popularly acclaimed and backed by efficient administration.

Two years later, this pump-priming rationale shifted slightly and, though it did not revert to what Robinson had implied was a funding culture of dependency, the language used to articulate the purpose of funding moved into a more supportive register with the Arts Council taking on a more active, protective role. Focusing attention on the artist as part of a celebratory “year of” initiative, the 2000 Review suggests that the organisation was concerned with ‘nurturing the artists, managers and administrators of the future’.¹⁶³ This led to funds being directed towards professional development, the establishment of careers advice forums and the support of a range of initiatives and guidelines (including Creative Partnerships with schools and the *Employing Disabled People* handbook) that aimed to help the sector grow in a broader fashion. The result of which may well be a more sustainable cultural ecology that generates more financial dividends in the long term. Nevertheless, it is clear from the professed desire to build a strong network of arts organisations backed by an actively engaged and expanding bureaucracy that there has been a shift in the funding discourse away from the pump-priming, explicitly sales oriented rationale of the previous year.

This shift was strengthened in the following year’s review. In a section titled *Focusing on the Artist*, Arts Council England described itself as a ‘support’ giving organisation.¹⁶⁴ Going further than the previous year’s descriptions of training and early stage investment, this terminology indicates that Arts Council England positioned itself as a weight bearing institution that performed a double

¹⁶¹ The Arts Council of England, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 3

¹⁶² The Arts Council of England, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 3

¹⁶³ The Arts Council of England, *Working for the Arts: Annual Review 2000* (London: ACE, 2000), p. 15

¹⁶⁴ The Arts Council of England, *Breaking New Ground: Annual Review 2001* (London: ACE, 2001), p. 6

task. Firstly, it provided help and encouragement to artists at the level of developing work, offering creative guidance and evaluative input. Secondly, it granted them the necessary resources to live and create work. It did this in several ways. It funded artists to travel nationally and internationally to develop their work through engagement with other practitioners and traditions. It sponsored a variety of professional development programmes designed to nurture better and more independently sustainable artistic practice. It undertook research into the employment patterns of artists to better inform the development of new legislation on culture, taxation and work.

Admittedly, these efforts had some financial impact. Professional development and the nurturing of sustainable artistic business models, for instance, certainly have a monetary aspect. However, it is apparent that, though potentially generating money in the long term, these measures primarily helped insulate supported artists from market pressures in the first instance. As the review states, ‘we are committed to supporting individual artists so that they are better able to focus on their work’ rather than the day-to-day necessities such as balancing the books.¹⁶⁵ This commitment runs counter to any liberal capitalist rationale, particularly the totalising idea of a reconfigured *homo oeconomicus*, and whilst it does not directly oppose Robinson’s earlier notion of no dependent organisations it certainly showcases a changed attitude. Explicitly, that the organisation is supporting artists to create something of value, but this value needn’t be monetary.

By 2004, however, this rationale of providing support in pursuit of other values had seemingly been reconfigured along more financially desirous lines. In his first Chair’s Report, Sir Christopher Frayling commented that the Arts Council ‘must question unhelpful divisions between [...the] publicly subsidised culture and the creative industries’.¹⁶⁶ He went on to suggest that ‘we should be talking about the power of the arts *and* the value they can bring across the whole realm of public and commercial life’, arguing that the Arts Council could even act in a matchmaking capacity between the range of public and private organisations that make up the arts sector.¹⁶⁷ In this way, Frayling showcases how the sentiment of subjective transformation *and* objective result articulated in Smith’s *Creative Britain* had become part of organisational thinking at the highest level as the more supportive, ecology-growing rhetoric of previous years diluted.

To be clear, Frayling is not recommending a denial of Arts Council function in this latter regard nor is he advocating a move away from state support of the arts. He asserted that, under his Chairmanship, the Arts Council would staunchly advocate for public investment. What he did do though is describe a reshaped organisational function and a changed relationship between the government, the Arts Council and its funded organisations. He states, ‘we shall act as an incubator of

¹⁶⁵ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 01*, p. 6

¹⁶⁶ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2004*, (London: ACE, 2004), p. 2

¹⁶⁷ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2004*, p. 2

new ideas and projects, an adviser on policy as it affects the arts, a partner for developing opportunities for artists and artistic practice and a matchmaker: between different parts of the public sector, and between the public and private'.¹⁶⁸ The latter part of this change is significant because, whilst the increased overlap between private and public sector may bring certain benefits, it is discernible that such a liberal shift brings with it an alteration in funding rationale. Explicitly, it has moved public support away from being a protective, nurturing resource to a form of investment in a willingly mixed economy aimed at attracting private matches that must, by the nature of the matching organisations, primarily pursue financial dividends.

By 2007, the organisation's funding rationale appears to have expanded further in this direction. In a relatively large section on *The Creative Economy*, the annual review presents the Arts Council's tasks as 'developing and sustaining the creative economy', *investing* in innovative work, and continuing to *stimulate* the relationship between the public and the private arts sectors.¹⁶⁹ Following the recent identification of The Creative Economy as one of six organisational priorities in the Arts Council's 3-year plan for 2006 to 2008, the prominence and sentiment of the funding rationale presented here is not necessarily surprising. Building on the changes identified in 2004, it does make clear, however, that any state support, rather than being utilised as a resource for organisations to fall back on, is explicitly given as something to propel artists forward into the marketplace and, in turn, help grow that marketplace. As a small but telling example of the development of this shift, it's interesting to note that the careers advice for artistic development offered in 2001 has been reconfigured by 2007 with 'The Creative Industries Business Advisory Service (CIBAS) support[ing] the growth of the creative sector by providing one-to-one specialist business advice, training seminars and networking events for artists and small arts businesses'.¹⁷⁰ This advice may certainly be helpful but in its capacity as business advice it marks a shift away from artistic development to an explicit consideration of an artist's economic potential.

Though moving slightly out of the time frame of this thesis, but as a useful and conclusive point to show the continuation of this trajectory, the focus on arts' economic potential had become even more intense two years later. Responding to the global economic crash, Arts Council England vowed to consistently lobby the government through financial reasoning in pursuit of financial goals in an annual review from 2009 that presented the various forms (and ideal effects of) Arts Council expenditure. As former Chair Dame Liz Forgan states, the organisation will act as a 'champion [for the] cause of sustained investment in the arts and never let government lose sight of the role of the arts in recovery from recession'.¹⁷¹ The review goes on to outline how this could be through giving

¹⁶⁸ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2004*, pp. 2-3

¹⁶⁹ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2007*, p. 27

¹⁷⁰ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2007*, p. 28

¹⁷¹ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2009*, (London: ACE, 2009), p. 3

money to suitable candidates, continued capital investment, Creative Partnerships with schools and the training of young people for future employment, or via sustained research into the interests and behaviours of paying audiences.

In the wake of the largest economic crash since the 1930s and with increased pressure on the grant-in-aid from government (slowing down from 2008 and soon to be cut under the Conservative-Liberal coalition), this increased emphasis on “real world impact” and the importance of showing the public, and those in power, evident and directly relatable returns on investment may certainly be justifiable. Nevertheless, it presents the idea that by 2009 the Arts Council’s funding rationale was no longer a supporter of the arts that also recognised their ability to make money; it was now a distributor of government funds mobilised in pursuit of sustainable investments and the hope of returns, be they financial, infrastructural or the delivery of more training and qualifications.

This changing vocabulary and the increasing prominence of a demand for economic dividends in reviews makes clear that the funding rationale of the Arts Council was framed and expressed in increasingly financially interested terms between 1997 and 2007/08. By the close of the period of study, the public-facing narrative presents an organisation that wants to generate a financial return or, more accurately, an institution that expects to create a positive financial impact through its expenditure. It thus presents an economic rationale that has gradually moved away from its position near the beginning of the period as a *supporter of artists* and has become, instead, an investor who *provides money for art work* that has the potential to attract a paying audience. This trajectory is acknowledged by Arts Council figures who were working at the organisation at the time. Former Senior Theatre Officer David Micklem suggested:

‘I definitely recognise what you’re saying and I suppose another way of phrasing that [.....] is that when I joined the Arts Council in 2001 “commercial” was a dirty word [.....] by the time I left in 2007, there was a recognition of a mixed ecology which was absent six years beforehand and a growing recognition that the Arts Council had a role to play across a broad ecology of practice which incorporated amateur work, professionally led work, professionally led work which connected to the creative industries or commercial activity’.¹⁷²

This combination of linguistic shift and a moving institutional role, supports, and is concisely expressed by Jen Harvie’s suggestion that there was a developing ‘recognition – or mobilisation’ of the arts toward achieving financial goals under New Labour.¹⁷³ It also indicates that by the time of the recession of 2007/08, after ten years of governmental push and prior to any radical economic turbulence, the Arts Council had certainly embraced a funding rationale that was more market-

¹⁷² Interview with David Micklem, See Appendix, p. 229

¹⁷³ Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2013), p. 64

friendly, open to new partnerships and increasingly aware of (and interested in) generating financial dividends. It is this market-oriented, financially driven turn which showcased a growing 'maturity' with regards to the commercial potential of the public-sector arts that has been labelled and discussed as the neoliberal turn and interrogated for the consequences it may bring.¹⁷⁴

Certain components of this apparently neoliberal turn are undeniable. There *was* a growing recognition of the private sector, the linguistic shift from support to investment, and the added emphasis on business training opportunities all point to a more prominent liberal economic ethos. However, in the vein shown by Shaw, I challenge such totalising branding and suggest that, whilst there may have been an increasing consideration of financial prospects in the funding process, this is not indicative of a growing, ostensibly pervasive, neoliberal economic rationale. Looking to the multi-faceted Arts Council agenda at the time, the range of material and institutional changes brought about by government throughout this period and by considering the sincerity of the linguistic choices of ministers and organisational leaders detailed above, the forthcoming analysis will demonstrate that the funding rationale was informed by a wider range of factors. Considering which, the acceptance of neoliberalism as a brand is inaccurate because whilst there may be certain crossovers between Arts Council interest and neoliberal qualifications there are not enough for this label to be wholly convincing as an interpretation.

Countering Neoliberalism: The Multi-Faceted Agenda

Beginning with a consideration of the multi-faceted Arts Council agenda, it is important not to dismiss the significance of other organisational interests. Counter to Hewison, I suggest that organisational efforts towards increasing access and developing work of quality were more than rhetorical smokescreens. The access and public engagement agenda was the driver for numerous standalone and ongoing research projects into the character of audiences, the pattern of their choices and the factors that impeded their engagement. It was also the driver for a range of specific policy initiatives intended to counter institutional barriers to a more diverse arts sector at the point of production. *decibel*, for example, was, initially, a year-long programme developed in response to the *Eclipse Theatre Report* that aimed to counter institutional racism in theatre through the production of new work and the creation of new opportunities. It led to a legacy programme of annual showcases and the Eclipse theatre company, a black-led National Portfolio Organisation that still operates today.¹⁷⁵

To be clear, the forthcoming chapter will certainly question the efficacy of this range of efforts but in its unpacking of research materials and policy approaches it will showcase a genuine

¹⁷⁴ Micklem, p. 3

¹⁷⁵ See <http://eclipsetheatre.org.uk/> for more information

organisational interest and commitment to improving public engagement that was backed by a larger, cross-departmental effort to tackle social exclusion. In doing so, it will reveal an organisational acknowledgement of the power of social barriers and the need to actively help those in less advantageous circumstances that sits uneasily within a neoliberal framework. Indeed, when outlining the risks of neoliberalism, Harvie suggests that the rampant pursuit of profit has the potential to neutralise art's other affects and put at risk a 'collaborative sociality', the social bonds that are generated in the shared experience of engaging with the arts.¹⁷⁶ These bonds are the very thing that the access agenda was trying to encourage. Thus, whilst the efficacy of that encouragement can be explored and challenged, it does not undermine the idea that the push for such results was legitimate and sincere. As further evidence of this sincerity, it is useful to consider the strength of backlash against the access agenda after a decade of New Labour and Arts Council effort. In 2007, James Purnell the Secretary of State for Culture dismissed the foregoing work and its impact measures as 'targetolatory', a brand indicating an overzealous and cultish level of devotion.¹⁷⁷ Recognising this sincerity and strength of commitment seemingly gives rise to a paradox. It is untenable to criticise New Labour and the Arts Council beneath them for being overbearingly socially instrumental *and* neoliberally driven in their funding choices. The near religious commitment to the hands on, socially engaged, directive ideal of one would cancel out the liberal, small state logic of the other. That both the pursuit of financial interest and social impact operated side by side, with the former coming to increasing prominence in the public-facing narrative throughout the first decade of the millennium, demonstrates that the funding rationale, though encouraging a pursuit of profit, cannot accurately be described as neoliberal.

Alongside this notable push on access policies the Arts Council also continued its efforts to support the development of work of aesthetic quality. These efforts have frequently been derided as occupying a less prominent position and sometimes dismissed as being dodged entirely. Writing in 2004, Jowell acknowledged this critique as a political failing: 'In this country we have avoided the more difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself. There is another story to tell on culture and it's up to politicians in my position to give a lead in changing the atmosphere, and changing the terms of the debate'.¹⁷⁸ In practice, the issue of encouraging excellence was more complicated than this and, whilst it may be fair to say that the positioning and approach to quality as a priority shifted in this period, exemplified by the move away from external peer-review boards to internal Arts Council discussions, it is unfair to say that it had minimal bearing on organisational practice or funding decisions. Commenting on the role of quality

¹⁷⁶ Harvie, *Fair Play*, p. 73

¹⁷⁷ Hewison, p. 143

¹⁷⁸ Tessa Jowell, *Government and the Value of Culture*, (London: DCMS, 2004), p. 8

in Arts Council thinking, Micklem reasons that if, in certain instances, the commitment to the highest standards of quality were relaxed ‘because of a desire to cultivate an ecology that would get into people’s lives that wouldn’t otherwise have access to the arts and culture’ then this was certainly not the case in each and every instance. Moreover, where such decisions were made, the process was informed by ‘lots of healthy internal debate about where on that spectrum instrumentalism, art for arts’ sake, any particular project, any particular company, any particular artist might sit.’¹⁷⁹

The primary concern from Micklem’s perspective, echoed equally by Arts Officers at front line level, was in creating a balanced sector with a variety of clients who, in overall combination, delivered access (and so public service) but also quality (and so artistic service and development).¹⁸⁰ The efficacy of this approach and the “balance” of its results can, again, be questioned and will be explored in the chapter on excellence but it is evident that even if quality occupied a lower position in Arts Council thinking than reflective government ministers and contemporary critics would like, it is clear from separate testimonies that this concern did not evaporate entirely and had an undeniable impact on the organisation’s funding rationale. Significantly, this impact, characterised as one part of an active and ongoing process of *ecology building and maintenance*, further strengthens the suggestion that the economic rationale behind funding decisions was not overwhelmingly influenced by a for-profit, hands-off approach from a neoliberal body. Indeed, the active shaping of the ecology in accordance with numerous agendas indicates that funding decisions were informed by a public-service mentality to distribution that was certainly interested in generating returns but that acknowledged these returns in a wider lexicon than the strictly monetised thought of neoliberalism would consider legitimate.

Countering Neoliberalism: Material and Institutional Change

This multi-faceted Arts Council agenda to create wealth, increase public access to the arts and nurture aesthetic quality was backed by sizeable processes of material and institutional change. Between 1997 and 2007/08, the Arts Council budget rose from £193 million to £529 million, a proportional growth of about 175%. This surge was part of a wider return to ‘unabashed, large-scale public expenditure under New Labour. In 1996/97, total managed expenditure was £309.1 billion. By 2004/05, it had climbed to £491 billion and through the half trillion-pound limit in 2005/06 to reach £522.8 billion. In the 2006 pre-budget report it was estimated to reach £554.6 billion, and projected to reach £585.1 billion in 2007/08 – an 89 percent increase on 1996/97’¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Micklem, p. 230

¹⁸⁰ See Mark Hollander’s outline of his and the Arts Council’s aims for the range of the portfolio in his Interview, p. 254

¹⁸¹ Elliott and Atkinson, p. 12

The precise significance of this explosive growth at an arts organisational level is hard to measure as the proportion of subsidy 'relative to other income streams varies enormously across the portfolio'.¹⁸² At the extremes of the spending, Arts Council England reports suggest that by 2003/04 'an estimated 10% of RFOs [Regularly Funded Organisations] received at least 80% of their total income from the Arts Council, whilst subsidy constituted less than 20% of total income for around one fifth of [arts] organisations'.¹⁸³ These polarised positions of reliance and independence were bridged by the remaining 70% of arts organisations whose subsidy made up around 40% of their total incomes.

In the case of theatre specifically, the proportions of earned income of 'average regularly funded theatres' held steady at around £140,000 per annum between 2001 and 2004.¹⁸⁴ However, in the same period the level of state support to those theatres took on a greater significance, growing from £180,000 to £240,000 per annum. This growth in public expenditure helped improve the financial position of 64% of state backed theatres, bringing many out of deficit and enabling them to take more innovative creative risks and develop new work for the public. From the perspective of supporting a theatrical ecology, such a stabilising move is laudable. Indeed, for all of the instrumental gains that may be made possible by this funding increase, it is evident that the first benefit of increasing average expenditures was the securing of the sector's venues and its core creative activities. However, in accordance with a neoliberal reading this move is an unjustifiable instance of state interference in a part of the market place that appears to be stagnating and should, accordingly, be left to grow or decay on its own merits. By using public money to bring nearly 7 out of 10 theatres out of challenging financial situations and ensuring that nearly 7 out of 10 arts organisations (including theatre companies) consistently received almost 40% of their income from state coffers, the Arts Council pursued an interventionist policy that presents a fundamental challenge to the inviolable independence of the free-market in neoliberal thought. This demonstrates that on a matter of first principles the organisation's funding policy fails to adhere to the tenets of the ideology that has been claimed to define that policy.

This growth in public funds that helped stabilise the ecology was matched by an increasing offer of strategic support that aimed to develop the ecology. Micklem comments that, during his tenure, an important part of his role as Senior Theatre Officer was 'deploying reasonably significant strategic funds to make interventions into contemporary performance to develop connections, develop new ways of working, support areas of practice that perhaps needed additional focus'.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Arts Council England, *Report 1: The RFO Portfolio 1996/97 to 2006/07*, (London: ACE, 2006), p. 3

¹⁸³ *The RFO Portfolio*, p. 3

¹⁸⁴ Arts Council England, *CSR Report 2: Theatres and Orchestras*, (London: ACE, 2006), p. 7

¹⁸⁵ Micklem, p. 229

This effort led to the creation of new consortias of arts organisations, popular outdoor festivals that still operate today (Without Walls, as one example) and the conscious development of ‘the stuff that sits outside of the mainstream’ that doesn’t necessarily sell.¹⁸⁶

This commitment to nurturing a more complete portfolio and, tellingly, Micklem’s description of it as an *intervention* on behalf of those practices that aren’t profitable or popular further strengthens the contrast between Arts Council funding and policy approach and a wider neoliberal ethos. At this point, analysts hoping to demonstrate that this ethos was influential despite Micklem’s claims might point to the administrative changes overseen by Gerry Robinson (2002) and Alan Davey (2008) and suggest that these stream-lining alterations provide two, distinct and sizable demonstrations of a more ruthless and business savvy approach in action. In counter to such claims, I would suggest that whatever bureaucratic organisational changes were happening, the practice of the body was still geared towards ecological support and development.¹⁸⁷ As evidence of this idea, it is possible to look beyond Micklem’s tenure and the period of study to 2010. At this point, a new government that was committed to tackling perceived state overspend and countering it with legislation that freed the private sector to become buoyant had recently been elected.¹⁸⁸ In their first public spending review, delivered in October, they passed on a 29.6% cut in grant support to Arts Council England. In response, under Alan Davey’s guidance, these cuts were disproportionately absorbed by the administrative structure so that direct arts spending was only curtailed by an average of 15%. This may appear as evidence of a neoliberal triumph, as an openly pro-private government pressured the Arts Council into sizeable cuts and administrative changes. However, in their response to the pressures of these more stringent conditions, Arts Council England demonstrated that their funding rationale was informed by an organisational willingness to absorb pressures so as to maintain, as best it could, the artistic ecology of the nation. Thus, by 2010, the organisation was still primarily interested in delivering arts support at a financial and strategic level, even if the ability to deliver that support, the depth and quality of it as an intervention, had shrunk.¹⁸⁹

Alongside this growth in the government grant-in-aid and interventionist practice, New Labour also oversaw the development of numerous other income streams. As noted above, a range of tax relief and encouragement measures meant that corporate sponsorship reached record highs in the period. Writing in *Creative Britain*, Smith commented that figures from the ABSA ‘show that the total amount of business donations to the arts in 1997 was an all-time high of £95 million’.¹⁹⁰ Ten

¹⁸⁶ Micklem, p. 228. Also see <http://www.withoutwalls.uk.com/> for more information on the consortium and its work.

¹⁸⁷ For discussion of these streamlining changes see contextualising history in Chapter 1

¹⁸⁸ (Prime Minister David Cameron would later boast of creating ‘a thousand jobs a day’ across the UK)

¹⁸⁹ See *ACE Annual Review 10/11*, p. 6

¹⁹⁰ Smith, p. 31

years later, business investment had almost doubled, with a pre-recession peak of £171.5 million given to the arts in 2006/07.¹⁹¹ Elsewhere, changes to rules on lottery expenditure meant that the billions generated by the game were becoming available for a wider array of uses than capital investment. Finally, New Labour's well-voiced mantra that 'joined up problems demand joined up solutions' led to the creation of a number of partnership opportunities through which the Arts Council and their supported organisations could cross subsidise their work.¹⁹² These opportunities were encouraged 'in all areas of public policy' throughout the middle years of the New Labour government and offered arts organisations funding if they contributed to healthcare, crime reduction or other socially oriented agendas.¹⁹³ The strongest example of these opportunities was Creative Partnerships which, between 2002 and 2008, made £220.8 million available for artists who were willing to work in schools.¹⁹⁴

The funding made available by each of these sources does not necessarily represent a stable, long-term alternative to state support. Corporate tax regimes can change, lottery funding can fluctuate with the popularity of the game and other spending commitments (such as the Olympics), and partnerships can cease as soon *their* source of support dissipates. However, this range of opportunities indicates that throughout the New Labour period, at least, the mixture of the mixed economy and the additional funds it made available to the arts was extensive. Admittedly, some of these sources (corporate sponsorship, for instance) may be based on business success that might be more easily used to evidence the influence of a neoliberal rhetoric on the funding rationale of the arts sector. However, I would suggest that this showcase of resources demonstrates that the Arts Council was working in an atmosphere in which there were a lot of choices before this rhetoric exerted a telling pressure. Explicitly, there was a wide variety of funding available to supported artists, in addition to the growing public purse, before they were faced with the challenges and opportunities of the free market and the starker measures of success or failure. Therefore, though not dismissing the significance of tax off-setting corporate investment efforts, it is important not to misinterpret the significance of such sponsorship as providing definitive insight into the character of the context that, in turn, colours the understanding of organisational practice.

Countering Neoliberalism: The Sincerity of Language

In combination, this mixed socially engaged and aesthetically motivated agenda that was supported by explosions in financial support from various sources and the interventions of the Arts Council for

¹⁹¹ Arts and Business, *The Survey: Private Investment in Culture 2006/07*, p. 7

¹⁹² Tony Blair, *Bringing Britain Together: A Speech* (1997), available at <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=320>, accessed June 2017

¹⁹³ Jane Ellison et al, *The Art of Partnering*, (London: Kings College London, 2015), p. 36

¹⁹⁴ Price Waterhouse Cooper, *Creativity Culture and Education: The Costs and Benefits of Creative Partnerships*, (London: PWC, 2010), p. 4

the purposes of ecology development counters many claims about a pervasive and overriding neoliberal ethos in the funding structure. In doing so, it invites the consideration of the sincerity behind (and the reasoning for) the pro-market, business-friendly linguistic choices made by key governmental and organisational figures in speeches, publications and the public-facing narrative of reviews plotted above. Simply put, if the funding decisions of the Arts Council were not overwhelmingly directed by strictly monetised thinking or the desire for financial returns, then why did its documents, key figures and representatives in government increasingly talk as if they were? The response, given variously by figures supported *by* the organisation, those on the front lines of relationship management *for* the organisation, those at the highest levels of policy development and funding decisions *within* the organisations and those in government *above* the organisation, is that the linguistic choices were made to help secure funding rather than motivated by a legitimate or wholesale embrace of the values that that language represents.

Jon Spooner, a founding member and Artistic Director of Unlimited Theatre, suggests that this language game was an effective means of putting any external partners, funders or business liaisons at ease. He explains the process accordingly,

‘we all had a title, we’re all artists, we’re all makers. Liz was Company Manager. I was Tour Booker. Louisa was Education Officer. It’s just job titles. We always say, anyone can have whatever job title they want. Some days, I can be High Wizard. I can be Artistic Director with the people that I need to be. I can be Creative Director if I’m working with people from media agencies because that’s more understandable for them. Some days, I’m just a writer, some days I’m a director, some days I’m a performer [...] The titles, of Education Officer, whatever, was just so that when we spoke to the people that we needed to be working with [whether, Arts Council, local council, sponsoring business or venue], they were secure in doing that [working with Unlimited]. And I think that we’ve always been very good as a company in helping other people [understand the company’s work and intentions]’ and consequently securing support.¹⁹⁵

For Mark Hollander, a former Arts Officer, such reassuring linguistic choices were key to securing and maintaining funding as these enabled arts organisations to present themselves as valuable in ways that funders and, by extension, government understood.¹⁹⁶ To be clear, Hollander is not suggesting that such choices were fraudulent. He maintains that at a fundamental level ‘we

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Jon Spooner, see *Appendix*, p. 239

¹⁹⁶ Between 2001 and 2013, Hollander held several roles in the Arts Council including arts officer, Director of the Performing Arts in Yorkshire and Senior Manager Funding programmes. In an echo of O’Brien’s 2010 report on measuring the value of culture, he suggests that the arts sector talks to the government in a language they understand. ‘techniques from economics are the most useful for government decision-makers wishing to measure and make judgements about cultural value’, p. 260

probably won that [economic] argument, and it was kind of becoming obvious when I was at the Arts Council that we weren't stripping the economy'.¹⁹⁷ The use of such comforting language, then, represented one way of articulating that economic victory. This indicates that, more than simply being a sign of willing conversion to a financial ideology or a task reluctantly carried out, it was a language chosen of practical necessity. Speaking of the requirements of artists and art supporting organisations Hollander asserts, 'The job of funders [is] to play to [that economic strength] To express that.... And it's the job of artists at moments to help Arts Council express that'.¹⁹⁸ Without this expression in such terms, it would be hard to gain support from government and so grow the sector in a way that would enable the better delivery of the more cultural and public service oriented agendas.

Moving higher up the organisational hierarchy, the importance of such results-motivated lobbying was further acknowledged by Micklem, a Senior Theatre Officer between 2001 and 2007, who suggested that the turn to economic language was *one part* of a reactive turn conducted out of necessity rather than an ideological conversion driven by choice. Given the New Labour government's preference for evidence-based policy making, the turn to economic language was a response to the decline in the bargaining clout of art's more intrinsic but ethereal values. He suggests that there was a need to find 'a different way of making the case to government [...] and justifying the significant additional investment that was being made through the Arts Council'.¹⁹⁹ The nod to economic dividends provided one way of doing this but it was not the only way. As Micklem comments, the argument became more than stating "'oh, aren't the arts and culture sector a wonderful thing and isn't it great that more money's being put in" and instead suggesting "aren't the arts and culture sectors wonderful *and* they're also impacting on well-being, mental health, reduction of crime, risk of reoffending'" amidst other areas, including the financial.²⁰⁰ This appeal to multiple instrumental agendas as reasons for support strengthens the pragmatic trend identified by Hollander and further showcases that the application of economic language and evidence represented just *one* method in demonstrating the value of funding rather than being *the* method, born out of a unifying rationale that dictates how arts budgets are both accrued and distributed.

This pragmatism carried all the way to Smith who acknowledged 'unashamedly that when I was Secretary of State, going into what always seemed like a battle with the Treasury I would try and touch the buttons that would work'.²⁰¹ This led to a "by any means necessary" approach, with Smith advising that any prospective fundraisers, organisation heads or ministers should 'use the

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Mark Hollander, see *Appendix*, p. 255

¹⁹⁸ Hollander, p. 255

¹⁹⁹ Micklem, p. 230

²⁰⁰ Micklem, p. 230

²⁰¹ Chris Smith, *Valuing Culture: A Speech*, p. 1, available at <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/File/VACUCSmith.pdf>

measurements and figures and labels that you can, when you need to, to convince the rest of the governmental system of the value and importance of what you're seeking to do. But recognise while this is not the whole story, that it is not enough as an understanding of cultural value'.²⁰² This duality of values indicates that at the highest point of cultural governance the funding rationale was split, with the Secretary of State's second comments alluding clearly to the idea that money is attained in accordance with one logic – itself an ad hoc mixture of a range of evidence-based approaches – but distributed in accordance with another – a more broadly defined notion of cultural value.

Ultimately, this clearly identified pattern of the conscious selection of comforting language, the rise of quantitative case-making, the reactive response to pressure from above and the use of a variety of argumentative means to ease those pressures demonstrates that the marketised turn in the Arts Council's policy discourse and public-facing narrative is more indicative of a process of pragmatic adaptation rather than a wholesale embrace of neoliberal ideology. In effect, the apparent neoliberal turn of the Arts Council appears as a feint in response to the demands of the wider politico-economic structure, carried out to reassure those in control of purse strings so that they, in turn, provide artists with enough resources to pursue their social and cultural objectives. In highlighting this variously articulated but clear through line of reactive thought in the cultural sector and by presenting it alongside the details of the different agendas, funding increases and interventionist stances, this analysis has shown how any attempt to brand the Arts Council as an organisation with a neoliberal funding rationale is 'restrictive in its assumptions, highly constrained in its mechanics and ultimately limited in its explanatory power'.²⁰³

Developing Alternatives: Outlining Utilitarian State Capitalism

To discredit such an interpretation does not, in itself, provide a better explanation of the character of the funding rationale at the time. It still leaves questions over how to explain the growing awareness and pursuit of economic impact in the arts sector and how to frame that push in relation to the evident range of other influential factors upon the Arts Council's approach to funding. To bring some resolution to this issue and provide a better understanding of the logic of funding under New Labour, I will use a combination of Throsby and Shaw to suggest that the funding rationale of the Arts Council can be effectively described as Utilitarian State Capitalist. From this theoretical basis, I will offer three case studies that show some of the ways that this Utilitarian State Capitalist rationale worked in practice, outlining the kind of art it funded and the kind of returns it considered valuable.

²⁰² Smith, *Valuing Culture*, p. 2

²⁰³ Throsby, p. 2

As established in the contextual outline to this chapter, New Labour were governing in a period of neoliberal dominance, where the organising principles of the global economy gravitated to the economic right. It also showcased that many of New Labour's policies (re)articulated a commitment to certain social democratic goals and that they appeared to take a genuine interest in creative practices. In the wider neoliberal framework, this policy interest in cultural work justified itself by evidencing real-world impact, 'what counts is what works' as New Labour's manifesto pledged.²⁰⁴ However, though this turn towards evidenced policy was framed by the global economic context, it is important to remember that the specific policy efforts were most directly influenced by the systemic logic of the areas in which they manifested. In effect, any given organisation may gauge its policy approaches in a way that mirrors contextual pressure but it is important to remember that the policy approaches themselves are not dictated by that pressure to the extent that the initial systemic logic, the goals and aims of a given organisation or sector, disappears from those organisational policies. As a clear demonstration of this, the four commentators sampled above showcase how the pragmatic, push-any-button approach was a way of effectively operating in the evidence-demanding context of the New Labour government so that they might secure grants that enabled the Arts Council to support practice that offered a broader, harder to define, dividend of cultural value.

Getting into more detail, the systemic logic of the Arts Council and its range of clients ensured that the 'principle propellant of policy choice' was the various instrumental and intrinsic interests that the organisation felt it could pursue in the hope of furthering its access and excellence agendas.²⁰⁵ Therefore, whilst such efforts may have been configured and articulated in a more financial language throughout this period, the continued pursuit of such goals indicates that a radical neoliberal takeover that prioritised financial returns to an extreme degree and marketised the thinking of funding recipients did not happen to the extent that has been suggested by the critical discourse. However, it is evident from the pressures detailed above, by figures in the process and by the reporting of policy initiatives, by performance against official commitments to Public Service Agreements and the generally increasing interest in the creative economy found in annual reviews, that some form of capitalist logic did play a part in the funding process. It might not have been neoliberal in character, but it was certainly there.

To begin to explain what this logic was, it is first important to step back and characterise my understanding and use of economics and capitalism in this instance. Economics can broadly be considered as the process of managing resources to address problems. In capitalist economics, the underwriting logic is that the efficient management of finite resources is carried out in the hope of

²⁰⁴ *New Labour; Because Britain Deserves Better, Election Manifesto 1997*, (Surrey: The Labour Party, 1997), p. 4

²⁰⁵ Shaw, p. 143

generating larger returns. X is invested in response to an issue or opportunity and Y is the desired result. In neoliberalism, as described above, these returns are ideally financial and potentially radical efforts are taken to maximise them.²⁰⁶ In other configurations, however, the return may be thought of more broadly. Such cases can still come from within capitalist economies, *those governed by the logic of returns on investment*, but here the return on a financial investment need not be financial. Looking to areas of government expenditure in most capitalist countries, for an example, spending on education offers training to children in a way that ultimately prepares them for work (so bringing financial returns to the nation through taxation) but it also enables the generation of other useful returns; the effective socialisation of children and the development of their physical, mental and emotional faculties, that suggests that the investment strategy is informed by a wider understanding of value. In other words, school is worth paying for because of more than its potential contributions to GDP.

In a similar way, the evident range of varied agendas, the active interventions by the Arts Council to nurture a diverse ecology and the pragmatic use of language to secure money for such purposes demonstrates that arts funding under New Labour is informed by an equally broad but ultimately capitalist understanding of value. In pursuit of a range of desired social and cultural benefits, public money is secured and spent in the hope of generating these benefits on a larger scale and, in doing so, ensuring the continued granting of public money and so the ongoing generation of benefits. It is this process that I identify as Utilitarian State Capitalism. To break it down clearly, I argue that it is utilitarian in the sense that funding is given in pursuit of a wider range of cultural and social benefits than the prioritisation of the reaping of financial dividends (though these dividends are recognised as *a* benefit in certain cases). I argue that it is a State economic model in the sense that the process is backed by public money. I argue that it is Capitalist in the sense that this money is deployed in the hope of generating a larger quantity of wider benefits or returns.

To show the workings of this idea in more detail, the following three case studies will present the range of ways that money was given to arts organisations, why money was given to them and what results were aimed for and deemed acceptable from their work. This analysis will thus demonstrate that the economic rationale of the funding process was informed by more than a dominating neoliberal demand for efficient business models and financial profit. These case studies will show that, as suggested above, the utilitarianism underlying the expenditure of Arts Council England is very broad and has much in common with David Throsby's six notions of cultural value; aesthetic, spiritual, social, historic, symbolic and authenticity. In showing this, the strength of

²⁰⁶ See Washington Consensus detailed above

Utilitarian State Capitalism as a characterisation of the Arts Council's economic rationale is that it recognises the capitalist orientation of the funding process (that grew in this period) but avoids the trap of falling into inaccurate neoliberal branding. It thus enables the consideration of the significance of other social and cultural influences on the organisational funding rationale whilst avoiding the risk of dismissing them as positive externalities. This is a phrase from the corporate market parlance of neoliberalism that suggests such affects are the unintended but fruitful consequences of a predominantly financial policy as opposed to the intended effects of a cultural policy with a broadly capitalist orientation. In this way, Utilitarian State Capitalism provides a more accurate reading of the economic rationale in the period that better articulates the nature of its underlying capitalism whilst also acknowledging the power of other policy drivers on the funding process.

Black Country Touring: Social Returns

Black Country Touring was founded in 1997, from the remnants of a defunded community theatre company, and was supported by a combination of local authority and Arts Council grants. From this beginning, the company has worked steadily to the point of attaining Regularly Funded Organisation status and, later, transferring to Arts Council England's National Portfolio.²⁰⁷ Their funding, though relatively small, has been a consistent and proportionally significant source of income. By the start of New Labour's final term (2005-2010), Black Country Touring received an annual grant from Arts Council England of £229,966 (or 46% of their income). This figure grew to £242,097 (41% of income) in 07/08 before dropping slightly to £238,424 (44% of total income) in the following year as government spending started to slow down in response to the recession.²⁰⁸

The work that the company facilitates with this money is a mixture of professional touring productions across the Black Country and more directly creative work with the local community that uses various performance forms (theatre, dance, comedy). These latter, socially engaged works grant a platform for local people to explore and present local issues, histories and experiences with professional artists in a range of spaces including theatres, found and converted sites. To give some examples, *Apna Ghar* (2006) was a performance staged in The Old School at Wednesbury. Developed through 'oral history recording techniques', the performance captured the domestic experiences of the South Asian community and then used these as the basis for dance and drama work.²⁰⁹ More recently, *The Corner Shop* (2008-09) offered a performative reflection on the 'different experiences of the people who have been running our corner shops for the last 50

²⁰⁷ At the time of writing, the company have just announced that their position in the portfolio will be secure until 2022. See, https://twitter.com/bct_us/status/879655187157221376

²⁰⁸ See notes in Interview with Stephen Johnstone, *Appendix*, p. 226

²⁰⁹ See, *Apna Ghar*, available at http://bctouring.co.uk/portfolio_page/apna-ghar-our-home-2006/, accessed June 2017

years'.²¹⁰ Staged in a disused retail unit in a shopping centre in West Bromwich and, again, using interview techniques to source the experiences of local people, the performance gave voice to the range of ethnic groups (African, Asian, Eastern European) that have served, become part of and shaped the community of the Black Country in the twentieth and early twenty first centuries. The company's current work *Life's a Beach!* (2017) is a partnership production with the So Festival Skegness. It is a touring production 'presented in three specially converted caravans' and, in a development on foregoing work, uses interviews, photographs and public submissions via Twitter to present and explore the various stories inspired by the British seaside holiday experience.²¹¹

These performances are always delivered at low-cost to the consumer, with the website currently listing the average cost of a Black Country Touring adult ticket at £6.50.²¹² This is £1 cheaper than current minimum wage hourly rate and, even if retroactively applied to wage levels under the New Labour government (assuming that tickets have not got more expensive over time with inflation) is still only 67p more expensive than the minimum hourly rate of adult workers in the final year of that administration: £5.93 in 2010.²¹³ This mixture of small scale, specifically socially reflective work and ticket price control means that 'there's not an economic argument for Black Country Touring'.²¹⁴ The company does not make enough money to be self-sustaining and 'if Arts Council, for whatever reason, pulled out, that would be the end'.²¹⁵

That Black Country Touring keeps receiving increasing funding, then, and moreover has repeatedly been given the Arts Council England seal of approval, as its status as a National Portfolio Organisation indicates, suggests that that this lacklustre financial performance does not overly influence Arts Council England's thinking as the financially tinged discourse and critical neoliberal interpretations would suggest. Indeed, despite the explicitly financial cost/benefit claims of the Greenbook and the suggestions of foregoing annual reviews that 'we will never have enough money to spare for those that cannot help themselves', it is evident that another rationale is informing the ongoing funding of Black Country Touring.²¹⁶

Stephen Johnstone suggests that this rationale is connected to the idea that 'there is a social and an artistic argument for Black Country Touring', that it provides valued returns other than the financial.²¹⁷ By Johnstone's own admission, the work of the company presents the experiences of communities that do not commonly engage with theatre practice; those from black or minority

²¹⁰ See, *The Corner Shop*, available at http://bctouring.co.uk/portfolio_page/the-corner-shop-2008-2009/, accessed June 2017

²¹¹ See, *Life's a Beach!*, available at http://bctouring.co.uk/portfolio_page/lifes-a-beach-2017/, accessed June 2017

²¹² See, *About Us*, available at <http://bctouring.co.uk/who-we-are/>, accessed June 2017

²¹³ See, *National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage Rates*, <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>, accessed June 2017

²¹⁴ Johnstone, p. 224

²¹⁵ Johnstone, pp. 224-225

²¹⁶ Arts Council of England, *Annual Report, 1998*, p. 5

²¹⁷ Johnstone, p. 224

ethnic backgrounds, those in lower income bracket and young children, to provide some examples. It thus empowers those often unheard or (creatively) invisible demographics to articulate their histories by creating or contributing to work. In doing so, Johnstone positions Black Country Touring's work as 'intrinsically tied to the fabric of society' and whilst he does not frame its efforts as social work or nakedly instrumental, he suggests that it strengthens the bonds of that fabric by delivering several "soft", but significant, outcomes: aesthetic stimulation, aiding clear communication, building trust and showing the shared humanity between groups.²¹⁸ He is supported in this interpretation by a number of audience reactions to the company's work. Talking about the 2012-13 co-production between Black Country Touring and Birmingham Repertory Theatre, *Eat!*, audience members commented that the multiple stories of war, poverty, celebrations, feasts, famines and fasts put food at the centre of the story and showed how it was an important and unifying thing for everyone. One viewer commented, 'it was as fantastic show. Loved all the different eclectic stories, particularly in the separate caravans with the small groups. It felt like a conversation rather than watching a show. For me, the fifth story was quite a surprise as well, at the end, that addition. Poignant and moving. Just shows how important food is to everyone'.²¹⁹

Ultimately, Johnstone asserts that the value of Black Country Touring is that it explores and offers a new social imaginary. 'It's about opening you up to the sense of possibility, the imagination, what you can do' and how you relate to others.²²⁰ By articulating his ideas in this way, Johnstone's expression of the value of Black Country Touring's work resonates with many aspects of Throsby's cultural value theory, namely, the productions detailed above deliver aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical and symbolic dividends. Connecting these results to the company's ongoing support from Arts Council England over this period, it is evident that funding is given *for* something but what that thing is cannot be simply categorised in financial terms as a cost/benefit gain. Instead, the range of results facilitated by state provision span a wider array of public benefits. The support of Black Country Touring's work can thus be considered as evidence of a Utilitarian State Capitalist funding rationale in practice. In this case, funding is given to stimulate returns that are explicitly and openly acknowledged as socially oriented and communally engaged and that are pursued in spite of a weak financial case.

The Cambridge Junction: Social Enterprise and Popular Returns

The Cambridge Junction is a multi-space arts venue just outside the historic centre of Cambridge. It programmes a range of forms including club nights, comedy, family events, live music, theatre,

²¹⁸ Johnstone, p. 221

²¹⁹ See, *Eat "What the Audience Thought"*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w-QTdZNUaE>, accessed June 2017

²²⁰ Johnstone, p. 220

dance and spoken word. In addition to these events it offers workshops to people in the local area, residencies to support developing artists and frames all of these efforts with an awareness of Cambridge's changing social needs. As Daniel Brine, the current Artistic Director comments, 'it's about what sort of society we want and how we can build it. And that could be anything in Cambridge. We could be the first cycling-only city in the country. [...]Or we could become a city that, you know, has no young people on free school meals'.²²¹ This programme is driven by a two-fold belief that the arts are changing, becoming more modern and varied, and that the distinctions between art and life are breaking down. In this context, the leadership of the Cambridge Junction suggest that the role of the arts-programmer is to help explore that fractious territory, bridging the changing relationship in new ways that helps bring the arts to people whilst widening the range of expression of both.

Given this range of activities, there is a great prospect for money making. The varied offer of the Cambridge Junction might be seen as able to attract more paying customers than the narrower formal choices offered by other, more specialist venues, such as opera houses or modern dance spaces. From this perspective, the support of the organisation given by the Arts Council could be interpreted as a pump-priming of an arts-business model with an exemplary capitalist ethos that indicates an embrace of a neoliberally tinged funding rationale. However, the Cambridge Junction's experiences of Arts Council England funding and their current economic model complicates this idea of an underlying, marketised and profit driven approach.

The Cambridge Junction opened in 1990 as The Junction music venue. From that point to the current moment, in which it is recognised as a National Portfolio Organisation, it has received public support for a range of purposes. In 1996/97, it was one of 19 organisations to receive a share of £15 million from a stabilisation fund distributed to stop arts organisations collapsing.²²² In the same year, it received £4,500 for developing new exhibitions and showcases of talent. Later, it received low scale but consistent grants, including £15,000 from a specific small venue fund in 2001/02 and £369,686 in grant support the following year.²²³ The most significant financial commitment to the Cambridge Junction by the Arts Council during the New Labour administration came in the wake of the Boyden report in 2001. The venue received lottery capital investment of over £5million. This was paid to the company in regular instalments, with 11% of total accrued by 2002/03 and 21.5% of total the next year in 2003/04. The newly refurbished venue opened in 2005, with the current multi-space structure described above. Lottery support of the building continued, though, to help the Cambridge Junction address 'capital issues and to undertake a review of the business model and to restructure

²²¹ Interview with Daniel Brine, *Appendix*, p. 208

²²² Arts Council England, *Annual Report and Accounts 1996/97*, p. 48

²²³ See Annual Review 01/02, p.39 and Annual Review 2003, p. 75, respectively, for details.

to ensure sustainability'.²²⁴ By 2008/09, it had received 99.8 % of its £5,951,921 capital investment award and completed capital re-development and business modelling the following year.

The business remodel supported by the lottery capital award was the development of a social enterprise approach to income generation and profit distribution. This model ensures that over 50% of the Cambridge Junction's income is generated by its events. The profits from this are then returned to the business to help bolster its services and so better deliver its cultural mission. In this case, arts development, popular programming and the delivery of opportunities for creative learning take priority over stakeholder dividends or profitable margins. As a business model, social enterprises are not irregular. The leading UK body on the Social Enterprise sector suggests that 'there are over 70,000 social enterprises throughout the country contributing £24 billion to the economy and employing nearly a million people'.²²⁵ Of these, 49% are younger than five years old, meaning that just over 35,000 social enterprise businesses were in operation before 2012. The Cambridge Junction is one of these older businesses and, counter to suggestions of an increasing neoliberal turn under New Labour, it was encouraged to be so by sizeable public investment, delivered since 2001, and a wider support structure that offered guidance and advice, from 2005.

Recognising this, it becomes clear that a socially engaged economic approach to arts funding not only survived under New Labour but, in this case, was actively encouraged. The ongoing support given to the Cambridge Junction, then, suggests that whatever the Arts Council presents as its narrative, emphasising the classic liberal values of profitable performance and self-reliance, it is not averse to consistently contributing to the development of social bonds through the manipulation of liberal capitalist economic relations. This is not to suggest that the Cambridge Junction can therefore be described as not possessing a pro-business stance. Indeed, the leaders of the venue recognise that money making is a necessary and important part of its approach: if 'we look at the popular culture programme, it's still by far the largest in terms of audience and money that goes through the organisation so it still dominates' programming choices.²²⁶ But it is to point out the key difference, that this stance is pursuing financial results in service to something other than their own ends. Specifically, the Cambridge Junction's publicly backed economic model is designed to strengthen the development of appealing popular culture and contemporary arts provision in Cambridge, with emphasis on the creative education of young children and their families.

This variety of aims once again demonstrates that any claims to a coherent and overwhelming neoliberal turn in Arts Council funding rationale is overstated and that the expectations on public expenditure encompass more than strictly monetised imperatives. Offering a

²²⁴ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2009*, p. 147

²²⁵ See *What is it All About?*, available at <https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/What-is-it-all-about>, accessed June 2017

²²⁶ Brine, p. 204

first-person perspective on this, Brine suggests that prior to changes to the Arts Council's administration and funding processes in 2011, the organisation treated the range of work carried out by the Cambridge Junction as if each were in a separate 'silo'.²²⁷ The arts programme received money for arts purposes, popular programming received money for popular purposes and the creative education team for educational purposes. The suggestion of a singular ideology that led to a dominant and binding funding rationale was not borne out by experience. Instead, different sources of money were applied for and granted for a range of reasons, albeit all whilst in recognisable service to the social enterprise model.

Taking this range of factors in combination, the significant public investment, the socially oriented economic modelling and the reflections on the lack of coherence of any financial expectations until after New Labour left office, indicates that the neoliberal branding is too much of an overstatement. Thus, whilst some aspects of Art Council England's ongoing support of the Cambridge Junction and the latter's economic drive may mirror qualities lauded by neoliberals (it is a business-savvy organisation that recognises the significance of popular culture and the importance of making money) these qualities are not sufficient to define either the Arts Council's funding rationale, or the Cambridge Junction that it supports, given the aforementioned factors. Alternatively, I suggest that, though different to the dividends provided by Black Country Touring, the profit driven social enterprise of the Cambridge Junction offers another example of a funding approach informed by a Utilitarian State Capitalist logic. In this case, significant sums of public money have been deployed to help develop a functioning business model that enables a self-sustaining and ideally growing range of aesthetic and educational returns to be delivered to a public by an organisation that recognises the importance of changing popular tastes and the issues facing the audience of its immediate social context.

Unlimited Theatre: Aesthetic, Spiritual and Symbolic Returns

Unlimited Theatre was founded in 1997 by Louisa Ashley, Clare Duffy, Liz Margree, Jon Spooner, Chris Thorpe and Paul Warwick. Unlimited describe themselves as 'storytellers and we want to change the world (even a little bit) for the better'.²²⁸ The company creates works 'that are wholly focused on the quality of that experience for the audience' and offers content that explores social issues, provides educational insights and acts as provocations for change, however small.²²⁹

To list some examples of this work, *Static* (2000) is a two-person play that explores the connections between warfare, ethnic cleansing and wider apathy through the delivery of dual

²²⁷ Brine, p. 204

²²⁸ See *About Unlimited Theatre*, available at <http://www.unlimited.org.uk/about/>, accessed June 2017

²²⁹ See *About Unlimited Theatre*, available at <http://www.unlimited.org.uk/about/>, accessed June 2017

monologues. In one case, a woman is travelling through her war-torn country and happens upon the body of her murdered husband. In the other, a man journeys home from work and starts watching a news broadcast that covers the events detailed in the first monologue. Through this mixture of the murderous and the mundane, the production prompts reflections on the role of mediated information in our daily lives and the connections between the apathy of one person and the fate of another. *Neutrino* (2002) presents the intertwining tales of a particle physics lecture on the abundant but isolated, tiny, titular particle and that of four loosely connected people meeting on a train. By placing these stories in parallel, the performance provides a demonstration of some of the principles of particle physics and invites us to consider 'loneliness, what it means to be alive, identity, memory and how we store and retrieve information'.²³⁰ *Tangle* (2005) continues this pattern of combining quantum physics with human stories. It presents the audience with information on quantum entanglement (the influence of one particle on another even as they are separated by great distance) and, in turn, uses this idea as an 'acting principle' that frames the relationships of the separated but co-influencing characters of the piece.²³¹ *The Ethics of Progress* (since 2007) is a performance-lecture, developed in collaboration with Professor Vlatko Vidral, that goes a step further than foregoing work. Taking as its basis an unpacking of the quantum physics concepts of superposition (that one thing can be in two places at once) and entanglement (as discussed above), *The Ethics of Progress* does away with fictional elements and instead outlines how teleportation is theoretically possible and invites the audience to consider what the implications might be, ranging from rapid travel opportunities to a streamlined mechanism for genocide.²³²

Alongside this range of more adult and science infused performances, Unlimited also produced a number of productions for children. These include *Play Dough* (since 2014) a 'playfully interactive gameshow about money' that explored the financial crash of 2007/08, the establishment of the *Unlimited Space Agency* (since 2010) an ongoing interactive project aimed to inspire the next generation of poet-scientists about space travel, and *The Giant and The Bear* (with Layla Rose and Hide & Seek, 2012) a circus show and interactive adventure for children and their families.²³³

This breadth of activity has been supported by income from multiple sources. Figures from the Regional Lottery Programme, the Lottery Touring Fund, Grants for the Arts and Arts Council England grant-in-aid reveal a company that is gradually growing in stature and support. In addition to this contributed income, the company generated money through box-office receipts, occasional

²³⁰ Lynn Garner, "Neutrino: Theatre Review" in *The Guardian* 11th August 2011, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2001/aug/11/theatre.edinburghfestival20012>, accessed June 2017

²³¹ Liliane Campos, "Science in contemporary British theatre: a conceptual approach" in *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* vol. 4 no. 38, p. 302

²³² For a recorded performance of *The Ethics of Progress*, see the Unlimited Theatre Vimeo, available at <https://vimeo.com/6102802>, accessed May 2017

²³³ See *Play Dough*, available at <http://www.unlimited.org.uk/projects/play-dough/>, accessed June 2017

‘corporate gigs’ and gleaned it from other public sources.²³⁴ Work in schools, for instance, not only provided Unlimited with an engaged and engaging audience of young minds but it offered the company the chance to ‘create income for us that then allows us to make the other work as well’.²³⁵ By January 2008, Unlimited Theatre had survived the cull of Arts Council England’s ill-received spending review and had secured £89,000 a year for the following three years from the grant-in-aid stream. This was followed by a move to the National Portfolio in 2012 and a further increase in funding to £165,000 per annum.

This progression, though founded on the ability to deliver work that the Arts Council had faith in because it met their targets, also reveals a confidence with money and a willingness to pursue and engage with it in a range of ways that contrasts with the earlier, economic criticism of the arts as a wasteful and inefficient sector or the more aesthetically tinged criticism that the artist is a pure being, unconcerned with material matters. Indeed, on many occasions Spooner has spoken of the importance of becoming comfortable with money and recognising how to best gather and use it. Writing in *An Incomplete Manifesto* from RADAR Festival 2012, he suggests, ‘find it. Work with it. Don’t be scared of it. Don’t trust it but also don’t make assumptions about it’.²³⁶ Whilst in conversations for this thesis, he spoke about the benefits of certain business structures that artists would be foolish to ignore. ‘There are lessons to be learnt. There’s real value in looking at other sectors and the way that other companies and businesses run. There’s a reason that these structures exist. There’s a reason why it’s important to learn about cashflows’.²³⁷

Acknowledging this more candid, entrepreneurial approach, that recognises the importance of the need for arts organisations to function as effective businesses and not to shy away from the central role of money in their creative process, it is possible to suggest that Unlimited Theatre, and the Arts Council that supports them, has certain correlations with a neoliberal ethos. Indeed, if the company is considered as an individual, their pursuit of funds and the desire to use those funds efficiently in the creation of a sellable creative commodity, then this understanding certainly tallies with the characteristics of the more hard-edged capitalism and monetised thought processes described above. Before committing to this interpretation, however, it is important to bear in mind a few other factors. Unlimited Theatre is a registered charity with non-profit status. Consequently, there is a question over how public money is used once it is accrued and what is considered a valuable return on its expenditure. Also, it is important to look to company members’ reactions to capitalism, more widely, to gauge the strength of the ardour for liberal economics that this entrepreneurial stance might initially seem to point to.

²³⁴ Spooner, p. 241

²³⁵ Spooner, p. 246

²³⁶ See *An Incomplete Manifesto*, available at <http://www.unlimited.org.uk/an-incomplete-manifesto/>, accessed June 2017

²³⁷ Spooner, p. 240

Addressing the demands attached to public money, Spooner is keen to point out that the reasons it is given and the responsibilities it brings did not quickly translate to an easily expressed desire for profitable financial returns. He suggests that whilst the Arts Council had certain financial expectations for the money that they gave, ultimately, they recognised that ‘what you’re funding is artists and what you’re funding is a process and what you’re funding is us to make work in a way that we make’.²³⁸ Therefore, whilst he is clear that there is ‘responsibility and the conditions that come with that and that’s part of what you accept by accepting the money’, this responsibility cannot be understood, nor funding given, in terms of financial reasoning regardless of how shrewd, confident or entrepreneurial the company in question is.²³⁹ In his experience with Unlimited, funding was given following ‘a very long-form conversation with someone [an ACE Arts Officer] who we had a very good, clear, honest, working relationship with. He understood the work. He understood who we were as human beings and as people and admired and respected that. And we set out from the beginning that that conversation was going to be one of openness and honesty and also one about the work and not just about how we get the money’ and how it should best be spent.²⁴⁰ Acknowledging this more rounded and expansive consideration involved in the funding process, it appears that whilst the entrepreneurial character and financial confidence of a company may be part of a wider case making approach, it does not exert enough pressure in this case to legitimise the description of the funded theatre company, or the body that funds them, as neoliberal. In the case of Unlimited Theatre, particularly, this initial supposition of a hard-edged financial operator is further challenged by a Spooner blog post from 2011. In “How Not to Inspire Creativity”, Spooner takes an oppositional stance to such an explicit and excessive push for financial returns, in this case generated through the protection of private property at the expense of individual freedoms and rights, reasoning that nakedly and extremely capitalist demands can have a stifling effect on creative practices. Closing the post with the open ended, but not hard to interpret suggestion, he equates ‘Capitalism + Lawyers= you fill in the blank’.²⁴¹

Combining this personal distaste with the description of why and what money is given for with the examples of company work detailed above, it becomes apparent that public funds are granted to help create aesthetically engaging and innovative work that delivers broadly educational material in the hope of changing the world in a little way. This change may not be as explicitly or specifically socially focused as other organisations discussed in this chapter (Black Country Touring’s giving voice to unheard minorities, or The Cambridge Junction’s engagement with Cambridge-specific issues) but it is certainly revealing of an Arts Council commitment to enabling theatre to help

²³⁸ Spooner, p. 243

²³⁹ Spooner, p. 243

²⁴⁰ Spooner, p. 243

²⁴¹ See, *How Not to Inspire Creativity...*, available at <http://www.unlimited.org.uk/how-to-not-inspire-creativity/>, accessed June 2017

the public develop new ways of perceiving, and so acting in, the world, whether that's by prompting reflections on ethnic cleansing, ideas of loneliness, memory, the influence we have on each other or the ethics of technological development.

By increasingly supporting this range of creative investigations, through touring grants, grants for project work and ultimately the granting of portfolio status and consistent funding, Arts Council England again demonstrates that its funding rationale is informed by more than a financially driven, neoliberal ethos. And whilst, more than the previous two case studies, Unlimited show a recognition of the importance of money and the need to make it and work with it well, this financial aspect is still secondary to the company's aesthetic and social aims in their relationship with the parent organisation. It is thus accurate to describe the Arts Council's support of Unlimited Theatre and their work as another example of funding in accordance with Utilitarian State Capitalism. In this instance, money is provided and utilised in an efficient, confident and well organised fashion but the profits from this investment and the reasons for it are broadly conceived in creative terms that prompt moments of reflection on wider issues that have the potential to generate great and varied aesthetic, spiritual and symbolic returns.

Reflecting on Case Studies & Conclusions

The range of examples demonstrate that whilst New Labour and the Arts Council pursued returns in the period of study, the funding provided to arts organisations was given in recognition that these returns need not be solely, or even dominantly, financial. In the three case studies outlined above, funding has been shown to primarily be given in pursuit of social, popular, aesthetic, spiritual and symbolic returns. Finance is certainly a consideration for these organisations, with some studies acknowledging the value of profitable financial performance and effective money management to their operation (Cambridge Junction & Unlimited Theatre, respectively). However, this is not the same in every case and it is evident that, even in such cases, the economic rationale underpinning the funding process is informed by far more than the demand for financial dividends and pervasively monetised thinking of neoliberalism. Thus, whilst it is accurate to say that the Arts Council increasingly emphasised accountability, had returns-oriented expectations and even ring-fenced funding streams to achieve certain dividends (all of which was reflected in changing language of the public-facing documentation) between 1997 and 2008, it is inaccurate to say that this process was conducted in accordance with a singular, domineering economic rationale that could most accurately be described as neoliberal, as has been suggested in the recent critical discourse.

Alternatively, the range of work detailed above indicates that the economic model that underpinned funding was more flexible in what it accepted as a profitable return on investment.

Acknowledging this flexibility but never losing sight of capitalist logic I suggested, and here reaffirm, that the funding rationale can be better categorised as Utilitarian State Capitalist, that is, a relatively small amount of money is given by the state with the aim of generating larger returns of a range of social and cultural values. Moving forward, a similar case studies approach backed by the critical weight of the “varieties of capitalism” thesis described above and a material analysis that recognises the significance of expanding state expenditure might be used to further develop the findings and ideas presented here. The value of this would, most immediately, be the better understanding of the complexity of the organisational funding rationale in a period of explosive budget growth and heightened governmental interest. It would also, over a longer period, further unsettle and, perhaps help establish a more effective replacement for, neoliberalism, the currently dominant brand for the sector but one which has been questioned and shown to be too blunt a tool to provide accurate analysis.

The Problems of New Labour, a Paucivorous Public and the Value of a Processual Access Policy

Context and Introduction

Following their election victory on May 1st 1997, New Labour set about delivering radical changes to the state-supported arts sector. An early move was to transform the Department of National Heritage into the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). This new ministry took a much more expansive and directive approach to the governance of the cultural sector. Under the Secretary of State Chris Smith, the DCMS carried out mapping exercises to reconnoitre their territory, it established Public Service Agreements (PSAs) with Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and created its own Policy Action Team (PAT 10) to explore how the state-supported arts might make a greater social contribution. All of this was done alongside the delivery of significant grant-in-aid increases to Arts Council England (from £193 million in 1997 to £453 million in 2010) and the financing of a range of public engagement projects, such as New Audiences (1998-2003). These efforts were part of a concerted effort by Smith and his successors to deliver the cultural mission outlined in *Creative Britain*; increasing excellence, access, education and economic value of the arts and contributing to the wider 'cross-governmental attack on poverty and social exclusion'.²⁴² Though well intentioned, the range of efforts have since been criticised as the beginning of an excessive and stifling governmental assessment culture and whilst this may certainly be a valid suggestion, it is important to remember that each of these moves marked a significant growth in government interest after a prolonged period of neglect under the foregoing Conservative administration. Consequently, they were welcomed at the time, with the 1998 annual review of Arts Council England commenting that 'new policy directions have been introduced by the government and embraced by the Arts Council'.²⁴³

The effect of this growing governmental interest on the Arts Council's mission to increase public access to the arts was striking. Beginning in 1998, the *New Audiences* scheme received an average budget of £5 million a year direct from government. This scheme aimed to 'encourage as many people as possible to participate in and benefit from the arts in England'.²⁴⁴ Splitting its budget across 14 strands, *New Audiences* supported audience engagement projects aimed at diverse, youthful, disabled, family, rural audiences and more. By its close in 2003, it had made 1,157 awards to arts organisations whose work had engaged with over four million people. Alongside *New Audiences*, the Arts Council also pursued other measures to increase and widen public access. In 2002, £29 million from the lottery-funded Arts Capital programme was earmarked to develop Black,

²⁴² Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 33

²⁴³ Arts Council of England, *Annual Review 1998*, (London: ACE, 1998) p. 5

²⁴⁴ Gill Johnson et al, *The New Audiences Programme Executive Summary*, (London: ACE, 2004), p. 1

Asian and Chinese led organisations. Elsewhere, Creative Partnerships between artist and schools were established in an effort to ‘encourage the overall intellectual creativity of both pupils and teachers’.²⁴⁵ By the time of their separation in 2011, Creative Partnerships had ‘worked with over 1 million children and over 90,000 teachers in more than 8,000 projects across over 5,000 schools’.²⁴⁶ Following the shuttering of *New Audiences* and wider legislative changes, the development of a diverse production base and audiences became a core Arts Council England aim in 2003, with all Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) having to submit diversity actions plans as part of the funding process. Then, in 2004, the RFOs were required to start recording results against their increasing PSA commitments. This measure was strengthened between 2005 and 2008, with the Arts Council identifying priority groups (black and minority ethnic, disabled, the socially excluded) and pushing for growths in the attendance and participation of these people.

In consequence of all these measures, there was certainly some growth in overall audience levels in this period. The annual reviews of Arts Council England highlight this success, showcasing the impact of large-scale organisational initiatives and the socially inclusive efforts of prominent RFOs and lower-scale arts makers. For example, the annual review of 2007 celebrates the Royal Shakespeare Company (an RFO) whose ‘annual productions aimed at families have successfully brought 150,000 people to the theatre for the first time’ over the last five years.²⁴⁷ Elsewhere, the annual review of 2003 singled out the significant funding increases to Mind the Gap, a smaller theatre company working with people with learning disabilities, as an exemplary organisation for ‘championing diversity’ and bringing new people into the arts.²⁴⁸

In addition to these annual reviews and in line with the evidence-based ethos of New Labour’s policy approach, the Arts Council also commissioned and carried out several public research exercises in this period: *The Arts in England* (2001), *Taking Part* (2004 onwards), *The Arts Debate* (2006-07) and *From Indifference to Enthusiasm* (2008). Similar to the annual reviews, the headline results of these studies often trumpeted striking successes. ‘Overall levels of engagement with the arts in England are high, using the definition of attendance and participation [....] over three-quarters of all adults (77%) have been to an arts event or taken part in the arts in the last year’ at least once.²⁴⁹ However, the more detailed findings beneath such headlines complicate this celebratory line and whilst there is support for the idea that public engagement with the state-supported arts grew (in some cases), it is evident from a closer study of these texts that this growth was not universal, rapid or indicative of a popular embrace. Taking this complexity as a starting point, I will

²⁴⁵ Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*, (London: Verso, 2014), p. 76

²⁴⁶ Creative Partnerships, Homepage <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/creative-partnerships>, accessed January 2017.

²⁴⁷ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2007*, (London: ACE, 2007) p. 15

²⁴⁸ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2003*, (London: ACE, 2003) p. 17. Funding doubled, from £50,000 in 2002/03 to £100,000 in 2005/06

²⁴⁹ Catherine Bunting et al., *Informing Change: Taking Part in the arts: survey findings from the first 12 months*, (London: ACE, 2007), p. 16

unpack each of these research pieces in more detail to show the extent of the successes and limitations of the access policy developed by the Arts Council under New Labour. From here, I will use a theoretical framework and lexicon provided by recent developments in British cultural sociology in combination with insights drawn from my own primary research to develop an analysis that enables better understanding of why the Arts Council's impact on access was mixed and where the potential for change may lie. Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate that both the Arts Council and the public may be considered as paucivorous in their tastes and practices. These are characterisations that point to distinct cultural value systems and cultural capital economies. The problem with this, as I will show, is that it prohibits processes of exchange or fruitful cultural overlap between these groups and so impedes efforts towards the increase of sustainable public engagement. The solution that this chapter will offer is that the Arts Council and the public need to be brought together more with the former, particularly, making efforts to re-orient itself as an omnivorous, expansive organisation. To do this there will need to be a change in approach to access, moving away from the formally narrow, demographically focused policy of New Labour years towards a processual approach that supports *how* people engage with the arts. This outline of a new direction will be bolstered by a case study which provides strong, practical examples of these ideas in action. The ultimate effect of this is that by its close, this chapter will have identified key problems and suggested some workable alternatives that both move the academic consideration of public access policies forward and ideally have some real-world potential.

Getting into the Details: Who are the Public and What Do They Do?

The Arts in England survey was carried out in 2001, with researchers conducting 6,042 interviews with respondents drawn from a stratified probability sample. 'The inquiry was concerned with assessing attendance at cultural events and participation in cultural activities, very broadly understood'.²⁵⁰ The questions covered attendance or participation in music across forms (rock, pop, jazz, classical, opera) and media (live and recorded). They assessed rates of engagement with the performing arts such as theatre (play, drama, musical, pantomime) dance (ballet and other dance) and cinema. They asked about visual arts engagement (museum or gallery visit, particular exhibition, craft exhibition, cultural festival, electronic art). The survey also took measures of a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics, including respondents income and class classifications and a variety of other variables, including; sex, age and education.

The central findings of *Arts in England* were as follows. For music, live attendance was generally much lower than engagement through home media (across all genres) and pop/rock

²⁵⁰ Tak Win Chan and John H. Goldthorpe, "Social Stratification and Cultural Consumption in England: Music in England" in *European Sociological Review* vol. 23 no. 1, p. 4

consumption was significantly higher in both modes than any other form of music. At the most extreme, 88.5% of respondent listened to pop/rock at least once a month via media, compared to just 16.3% for opera/opera. Findings in other cultural forms were similarly stark, with popular culture being many times more attractive than state-supported arts culture. In the case of cinema, 62.7% of respondents visited the cinema at least once in the last twelve months compared to 1.9% for the ballet. Elsewhere, over a third of people (38.7%) visited a museum or gallery compared with less than one tenth (7.7%) who visited an event involving video or electronic art. The combined effect of this was to show that, in 2001, whilst a fairly sizeable minority engaged with state-supported arts activity once a year (the mean of public attendance at even the three least popular forms of publicly supported culture still amounted to 5.1% of the 16+ population or just over 2.4 million people) this figure was dwarfed by engagement with more popular or educational cultural forms. The mean of cinema attendance, mediated pop and museum attendance was 63.3% or just over 29.7 million. The reasons for this disparity are not made clear given *The Arts in England's* exclusive focus on quantitative measures of engagement rather than qualitative explanation of choice. However, the marked preference for mediated consumption, the dominance of cheaper practices and an interest in the educational qualities of culture provide early indicators of public concerns that were identified and explored in greater detail by subsequent research. This work endeavoured to not just measure rates of engagement but allowed the public to voice the rationale of their cultural approach.

Taking Part in the Arts is an annual Arts Council backed survey that began in July 2005. It is the 'major survey of cultural and sports participation in England'.²⁵¹ Like *The Arts in England*, *Taking Part* gathers statistical data of attendance rates in a range of activities and in connection with a range of demographic factors. It also 'asks about participation in creative activities and sport, and motivations and barriers to engagement'.²⁵² It thus provides a more comprehensive description of the cultural landscape. This chapter will draw on the results of the first 12 months of study, from July 2005 to July 2006 which were published in May 2007. This sample is useful because it provides insight into patterns of public engagement and thinking after almost a decade of New Labour efforts to improve them.

It found that 'UK households spent an average of £443.40 per week in 2005/06 and the *second highest category of spending* was recreation and culture, at £57.50 a week' [my emphasis].²⁵³ This significant spend manifested in a notable split in the patterns of cultural attendance and cultural participation. *Taking Part* found that the 'most typical frequency of attendance (49%) [across

²⁵¹ The Taking Part Survey Homepage, <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/taking-part-survey>, access January 2017

²⁵² The Taking Part Survey Homepage, accessed January 2017

²⁵³ Bunting, *Taking Part*, p. 58

seventeen recognised forms] was fairly irregular – once or twice a year – while the highest proportion of participants engage in [one of nineteen] arts activities at least once a week (46%)’.²⁵⁴ These rates are likely to vary dependent on certain factors. Those who defined themselves as White are more likely to be regular arts attenders (at a rate of once a month) than those who defined themselves as Black or another minority ethnic group. Elsewhere, those in higher managerial or professional occupations were almost four times less likely to entirely opt out of cultural attendance or participation than those who have never worked or are long term unemployed. It was also found that area can have an impact on rates and reasoning for arts attendance and participation, with 37% of the Yorkshire populous stating lack of interest as the main reason for little engagement, compared to 37% of Londoners who cite a lack of time. Nevertheless, despite the colour provided by these specific demographic readings, *Taking Part* revealed a clear overall split in modal preferences for cultural engagement, with amateur participation dominating attendance at professional events.

Considering this split in more detail, the inaugural survey revealed that the top three reasons given for participation were enjoyment (62%), relaxation (8%) and to develop new skills (7%). The top reasons given for attendance were a liking for a given type of event (29%), the attraction of a specific performer or performance (28%) and the possibility of spending time with friends and family (13%). Enjoyment was only the 9th most common reason given for attendance at arts events, amounting to just 2% of total responses. The identification of these reasons and their relative weighting enabled the drawing of certain tentative conclusions and by the close of *Taking Part* the authors suggest that ‘increased choice in the consumer sphere and a decline in deference and tradition have influenced public attitudes and expectations. Traditional social infrastructure and centres of authority have become less dominant’.²⁵⁵ Consequently, the range of ways in which people express, consume and practice their cultural identities has expanded significantly. In this context, whilst certainly putting efforts into diversifying its portfolio and public offer, the Arts Council has been unable to keep pace with this rapid change and so has become less relevant and less appealing. A possible solution suggested by the reviewers, for both a better public service and perhaps for the preservation of the Arts Council itself, is to recognise and support ‘art that matches how we live’ now.²⁵⁶

The need for this change and the extent of the gap between public lifestyles and the Arts Council and its supported organisations was further explored by *The Arts Debate*, also in 2006. Commissioned to celebrate the Arts Council’s 60th birthday and intended as a building block in a new public value approach that would generate more effective policy, *The Arts Debate* was the first time

²⁵⁴ Bunting, *Taking Part*, p. 17

²⁵⁵ Bunting, *Taking Part*, p. 63

²⁵⁶ Bunting, *Taking Part*, p. 67

in Arts Council history that those in the sector *and* the public were asked at length and in detail about their cultural interests. Adopting a qualitative approach, the authors of *The Debate* arranged twenty group discussions and a number of in-depth interviews with samples of the population taken from a representative cross section of the subsidised arts and England, more widely. Talking to arts makers, managers, stakeholders and members of the public, the researchers ‘sought to understand how the Arts Council can best balance public aspirations with the needs and priorities of our partners in the arts community’ and, more generally, get a sense of what the English knew or felt about the state-supported arts.²⁵⁷ This endeavour did not illuminate universal endorsement of the Arts Council as might have been hoped in a birthday year. Worryingly, the debate discovered some troubling perceptions of the subsidised arts and the Arts Council. It also revealed significant impediments to public attendance and exposed a notable willingness amongst the public to opt out of state-backed culture entirely.

The Arts Debate discovered a clear and often forcefully argued distinction between what the public accepted as art and what they perceived to be “the arts”. ‘It became apparent in the first wave of research that while participants might talk about what counts as “art” in a fairly free-wheeling way, their definition of what counts as “the arts” was not the same thing at all’.²⁵⁸ The question of what counts as art evoked a broad range of responses. A significant portion of the public initially suggested that they thought of ‘art in terms of visual arts and even fine art’. Some respondents ‘took a broader perspective’, though.²⁵⁹ From this, craft, design, domestic and artisan work were all accepted as art because such objects and activities possessed qualities which were identified as necessary components of art work; they required skill in production and could evoke powerful feelings in reception. These differing understandings were not held to be mutually exclusive by respondents. It was not the case that those who gave immediate, more conventional responses dismissed those individuals who had a broader view of art, or vice versa. Conversely, ‘once more conventional boundaries had been crossed by one or more group members others might take up their lead and follow quite willingly’.²⁶⁰

This willingness led to the creation of long lists of activities that were considered art and whilst it must be recognised that the length of these lists and the inclination to contribute suggestions was influenced by social factors (for instance, wealthier and more engaged respondents were more forthcoming with suggestions) there was still a breadth of response across various social demographics. These responses numbered 59 non-repetitive entries that incorporated “traditional” forms (the visual arts), artisanal or craft work (pottery or gardening) and creative daily behaviours

²⁵⁷ Catherine Bunting, *Public Value and the Arts in England: Discussion and Conclusion of the arts debate*, (London: ACE, 2007), p. 4

²⁵⁸ Creative Research, *The Arts Debate: Findings of the Research Among the General Public*, (London: Creative Research, 2007), p. 39

²⁵⁹ Creative Research, p. 22

²⁶⁰ Creative Research, pp. 22-23

(sport and sex).²⁶¹ The responses also crossed several spaces. Art was often described as being possible anywhere and whilst there was acknowledgement of established and specialist spaces (galleries, for example) the range of acceptable locales was far more expansive. People's homes, their children's schools, local parks and sports grounds, heritage sites, cinemas, leisure centres and even the body itself were all considered acceptable sites for art practice. Art, then, was the name given by the public to a range of activities accepted by the majority of people that are performed on a regular basis in a variety of spaces and which are part of everyday life. In a neat but not surprising correlation, the range of practices that the public identified as art can be read as a blueprint that meets the demand of *Taking Part's* concluding call for art that matches how we live now.

This expansive formal and spatial understanding does not carry over to public ideas about "the arts" which, in turn, illuminates some potential problems for the Arts Council. "The arts" were defined in a 'fairly established and rather narrow' way that was influenced by what respondents learnt at school, saw on arts programmes and television or noticed as institutionalised in the world.²⁶² 'The list of art forms that were offered as "the arts" therefore, not surprisingly perhaps, reflected (with the exception of the combined arts [which respondents expressed some confusion over]) those that make up the Arts Council's core remit; literature, music, painting, photography, theatre, ballet, opera and so on'.²⁶³ "The arts" are established, traditional activities that take place in particular, specialised spaces (theatres, opera houses, galleries), notably apart from daily life. Consequently, the *Arts Debate* found that 'everybody saw "the arts" as less accessible than some of the "art" they had been discussing'.²⁶⁴ This distinction was held by many respondents, with even those who engaged in "the arts" on a regular basis suggesting that they were distanced and specialist; 'you do tend to confine it to a few things and then it is elitist and it is middle class'.²⁶⁵

This sense of distance was strengthened by a range of material and psychological factors that were identified as having a detrimental effect on the likelihood of public engagement. Some of these factors were immediately apparent and (theoretically) easier to remedy. Cost and lack of time, for instance, were the most frequently given practical impediments to public access and might be effectively countered with discount drives or alterations in programme timetable. The psychological barriers described by the public were more substantial, insidious and not as easily remedied. They covered the low valuation of arts' worth, a feeling of being unwelcome or unlike other attenders and an uncertainty about behaviour and the fear of looking foolish. At their most extreme, these material and psychological factors exerted such influence on public attitudes and practice that

²⁶¹ See Creative Research, pp. 23-24 for the full list

²⁶² Creative Research, p. 40

²⁶³ Creative Research, p. 40

²⁶⁴ Creative Research, p. 40

²⁶⁵ Creative Research, p. 40

sections of the least-engaged population became 'anti-engaged'.²⁶⁶ This group was wilfully unengaged in Arts Council supported forms and actively contrary in their cultural choices; exclusively favouring dance machines, karaoke and drinking in pubs.

Alongside these investigations into public taste and cultural practice, *The Arts Debate* also gave the public opportunity to voice their opinions on the Arts Council as an institution. It did not fare well. Despite having worked for nine years to diversify its portfolio, engage new audiences with specific initiatives and co-ordinate expansive infrastructural developments there was no clear understanding amongst the public about what the Arts Council is or does. They were largely unaware of the remit of its work, who works there and how much money they draw from public coffers. When informed of these facts there was a slight improvement of perception. For instance, when told that funding levels, at the time, equated to 39p from every household each week some respondents commented 'I'd be quite happy to give 39p tax, it's only 39p'.²⁶⁷ However, even amidst these pleasing responses there were still consistent calls for greater organisational transparency and the introduction of a wider range of voices into the policy making process.

By its close, *The Arts Debate* revealed a clear trend that, for many of the public, whilst the state-supported cultural sector was certainly available it was not readily accessible, the distinction being that many of the public could recognise the arts and they felt the infrastructure was reachable but this did not translate into frequent engagement. Concerns over elitist forms, uncertainty over behaviour, governance structure and the influence of time and money pressures in daily life meant that less risky, more enjoyable cultural choices (cinema, television, amateur practice) were often made. The discovery of such a pervasive public sense grants qualitative weight to the more challenging findings of *Taking Part* (both documents give significant play to the idea of a lack of enjoyment in the arts, for instance). In doing so, it further encourages the critical consideration of the efficacy of Arts Council access work in the first decade of the New Labour era and, given the extremity of opposition in certain cases, forces the question of *why* were these efforts not as effective as hoped?

From Indifference to Enthusiasm, the final resource under consideration here, offers some timely reflections on data that aids the development of responses to this question. Published in 2008, this research document is the product of further quantitative analysis of the earlier *Taking Part* data set. It offers four ways of characterising an individual's patterns of attendance across forms and then, from this base, develops a variety of theoretical models that provide forecasts of a given individual's likelihood of belonging to each characterisation based on certain demographic factors; gendered or racial identity, marital and educational status, income and more. The

²⁶⁶Creative Research, p. 43

²⁶⁷ Creative Research, p. 98

characteristic categories it offers are as follows; those whose attendance is 'Little if Anything', 'Now and Then', 'Enthusiastic' and 'Voracious'.²⁶⁸ Membership in each is based on rates of attendance at arts events measured, respectively, at 0 times a year, 1-2 times a year, 3+ times a year and 3+ times a year across two or more forms. The proportional breakdown of the adult population of England into each of these categories is not encouraging for the Arts Council. Overwhelmingly, to a rate of 84%, the population belonged to the Little if Anything and the Now and Then groups. Only 16% of the population could be labelled as enthusiastic or voracious averaged across all forms, 12% in the former case and 4% in the latter.

This means that, after almost a decade of sustained efforts, only 4% of the adult population of England engages with a range of publicly funded arts frequently and here "frequently" should be accepted with caution as the phrase can be deployed after a minimum of *just six* attendances at arts events by an individual in a year. At its lowest level, this would mean that the *most insatiable* arts attenders did something every 60 days, or once every two months. This number is certainly higher than comparative figures for less engaged counterparts but it would be a mistake to assume that such "regular" attendance was synonymous with high engagement. As an instructive example, if this rate were applied to the public's engagement with other cultural practices such as gym use, watching football matches or reading at home it would be hard to accept them as regular activities.

Within this limited range of groups that engage regularly there are still clear formal leanings. Theatre, cinema, museum and visual arts organisations can lay claim to an enthusiastic category that consists of 9% of the population. Within this, 94% attend drama or plays 3+ times a year (8.4% of the entire survey population), 81% are 3+ cinema attenders (7.2% of the entire survey population), 96% are 3+ arts exhibition attenders (8.6% of the entire survey population) and 85% are 3+ museum/gallery attenders (7.6% of the entire survey population). Comparatively, only 3% of the total population interviewed about music could be considered enthusiastic attenders. Of this, only 19% are 3+ opera attenders. This figure equates to around 0.6% of the total survey population. These different figures demonstrate that, though *relatively* more so, popular arts practices are not that popular and unpopular arts practices are near untouched, even by those most engaged.

The scale of this discrepancy invites the reconsideration of the influence of demographic factors on public arts attendance. Conventionally, demographic factors such as race, gender and education are held to be *decisive* influences on levels of public arts engagement. However, the low figures of enthusiastic engagement here demonstrate that certain arts practices struggle to appeal to *everyone* and whilst those that do them may have certain qualities in common it is evident that those engaged do not represent the majority of their respective groups. Looking to the example of

²⁶⁸ Catherine Bunting et al., *From Indifference to Enthusiasm: Patterns of Arts Attendance in England*, (London: ACE, 2008), p. 8

enthusiastic opera attendance given above, the figure of 0.6% (if attributed to a single demographic characteristic) does not make up the majority of any part of the population; white, BME, male, female, school leaver, degree holder or otherwise. This suggests that whilst demographic factors may contribute to our understandings of engagement they cannot provide definitive explanations as to what types of people engage and why in isolation. It is therefore important to consider other possibilities and a fruitful and, perhaps, obvious place to start is with the supported forms themselves. In this case, it is opera but, by extension, other Arts Council forms might be investigated to discover their formal appeal and challenges. This question of formal appeal will be discussed in more detail later but is introduced here as a primer for thinking and an early introduction to the idea that one route to increasing public engagement might not be to address access by looking at who's doing the arts but, rather, to consider what arts are supported and why.

In line with this more reflexive consideration of demographic factors, the analysis of the survey data and the modelling of hypothetical individuals in *From Indifference to Enthusiasm* revealed compelling new ways of seeing these often taken for granted issues. Most pointedly, the analysis of certain demographic factors found that they, rather than being decisive, had little effect on levels of engagement. In challenge to the egalitarian aims of New Labour's socially inclusive policy and the critical politics of Bourdieu's historically, dominant sociology, income and social class were found to be of little influence when other factors (such as education) were held as equal. Significant wage jumps of tens of thousands of pounds made minimal difference in attendance rates in the variously modelled cases. Equally, disability (something singled out as a priority group by the Arts Council) was found to have 'no statistically significant effect on an individual's chances of being a particular type of arts consumer once the effect of other factors has been taken into account'.²⁶⁹ This finding may be testament to the infrastructural improvements made since the advent of lottery funding and the direction of Arts Council and, by extension, New Labour policy in this area but even in this success it is useful to remember the sobering public perception of the arts' availability, rather than their accessibility.

Elsewhere, race, gender, age, familial structure and health were viewed to be influential in certain scenarios but not in all. The equalised analysis of these factors acknowledged certain patterns that conform to anecdotal claims and other research findings; black people are less likely than white people to attend arts events, men less likely than women and school leavers are less likely than university leavers. However, in their articulation of these findings, the authors of *From Indifference to Enthusiasm* are careful to express that whilst there might be certain patterns associated with certain demographic factors, these should not be used to set policy problems and

²⁶⁹ Bunting, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm*, p. 41

goals in stone as such overarching readings, by their nature, miss the subtleties within any demographic tag. For instance, whilst black people may be less likely than white people to attend the arts, generally, the authors point out that ‘people who define their ethnic group as Black are more likely to attend soul, R&B or hip-hop music events, African/Asian dance events and carnival than those who define their ethnic group as white’.²⁷⁰ To operate as if this were not the case, runs the risk of developing a well-funded and well-intentioned access policy that, rather than bring varied cultural practices and audiences into the mainstream, positions them in a lavish ghetto; lovingly supported but clearly marked as different.

The two stratification variables that proved ‘consistently significant’ are education and social status.²⁷¹ Education had a varying effect on probability of attendance but the evident pattern is that the higher the educational level the more likely an individual is to have at least some level of arts attendance. This holds regardless of any other factors. In the range of models offered by the text, a degree holder’s likelihood of being enthusiastic or more was 60% if they were a London-based, white woman in her 40s, 20% if they were a West-Midlands-based Asian man in their 50s and 10% if they were a North-West-based black man in their 20s. These figures are in stark contrast to the same models with no qualification, where the chance of enthusiastic or greater attendance is 20%, 5% and 2% respectively. Social status is more complicated than education in its character but its effect is similar, though less pronounced at the higher levels. The development of social status thinking ‘aims to bring individuals together who would be likely to engage with each other in more intimate forms of social interaction – in particular, close friendships – and thus to treat each other as social status equals, rather than as social status superiors or inferiors, and in turn be likely to share in a common lifestyle’.²⁷² To achieve this, the authors of *From Indifference to Enthusiasm* fold together occupation, education and income data in a multivariate analysis that allows for a more rounded understanding of attendance to develop through triangulation of influential but not singly definitive factors. They found that, with the standardised London-based woman in her 40s example, the highest status model had a 44% chance of being enthusiastic or voracious, the middle status model had a 30% chance of being enthusiastic or voracious and the lowest status model had a 25% chance of being enthusiastic or voracious.

Following this characterisation of attendance rates and exploration of the differing influences of demographic factors, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm* draws on some qualitative statements from *The Arts Debate* to help frame its final interpretation of this work and offer some tentative conclusions. It suggests ‘arts attendance seems to be driven by some concept of identity –

²⁷⁰ Bunting, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm*, p. 64

²⁷¹ Bunting, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm*, p. 10

²⁷² Bunting, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm*, p. 12

who we think we are, the type of people we perceive to be our social status equals and the kind of lifestyle we deem appropriate and relevant to people like us'.²⁷³ Accordingly, a more cautious embrace of demographic interpretations of arts access, the recognition of the appeal (or lack thereof) of certain forms and the need to develop engagement at a wider social level (through education and status equalisation measures) all become, more than failings of the current approach, clear areas in which to ground the development of access policy in the future. This developmental thinking is matched by a clearer, new language that emphasised the need for the organisation to 'demystify' and better nurture the 'public ownership' of the arts.²⁷⁴

This new language is striking and represents – if not practical change – then certainly the theoretical recognition of the need to develop a new approach to arts provision and governance. However, it is important to not become overawed by this move. At the close of the document, there is also the frank admission that before any radically transformative moves are made to give the arts back to the people, the Arts Council needs to look in more detail at what people are doing and how the factors identified as most influential are informing this process because at this point it simply does not know enough. Writing on the nature of the correlation between higher education and higher engagement, for instance, there is the confession that 'more in-depth research is needed before we can answer this question with any certainty'.²⁷⁵

This question of knowing provides a timely opportunity to reflect on what this range of research documents illuminates about the efforts and consequences of the Arts Council's access policy between 1997 and 2008. The overall effect is mixed, showing the Arts Council as a well-intentioned organisation, supported by a crusading government, that made significant financial outlays, administered a range of initiatives and actively addressed infrastructural and demographic issues in the hope of increasing levels of public engagement with the arts. These efforts, though not without certain successes, failed to deliver and maintain the sizeable gains that might have been hoped for and, by 2008, the majority of the public (84%) were still understood to be little, if anything, or now and then arts attenders. More significantly, by 2008, the range of research considered above had discovered a clear frustration with "the arts" of the Arts Council. Many of the public felt alienated from state subsidised forms, knew little about the organisation and, at the most extreme, actively avoided what they offered. Alternatively preferring to pursue their cultural interest in other ways – whether participating in art practice at an amateur level or attending a wider array of cultural events not recognised by the Arts Council (concerts, craft fair or communal activities).

²⁷³ Bunting, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm*, p. 64

²⁷⁴ Bunting, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm*, p. 67

²⁷⁵ Bunting, *From Indifference to Enthusiasm*, p. 63

The discovery of such damning information after six decades of operation and ten years of sustained public engagement efforts encouraged a growing awareness of the need to make changes; formal expansion, arts fitting into life, organisational transparency and more voices in the policy process are all ideas that percolate across these documents. To an extent, these were moves that the Arts Council had already been making in certain areas and would continue to make beyond the window of this thesis. However, given the scale of public disengagement and the persistent patterns of budgeting in the wake of this range of research (by 2012/13 the Royal Opera House was still highest single paid client, with a budget of £27.4 million) it is evident that the Arts Council still struggled to make the changes that this research points to and engage with the public in a large-scale fashion.

Given that it had a wealth of data offering quantitative and qualitative insights that helped explain why the public stayed away and what they felt would be a helpful change, the clear question for such damning continuation of the struggle with access policy is why? An effective way of beginning to respond to this question is provided by recent advances in UK-based cultural sociology, developed in two strands, by Tak Wing Chan and John H. Goldthorpe in Oxford and by the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC) in Manchester. In the following section, I will provide a review of this work, outlining the tradition it developed from, its responses to that tradition, what it offers for current research and how it will be used here. Having done this, I will use this sociology to incorporate the various factors and findings unpacked above into a clear characteristic description of the Arts Council and the public at this time. This description will not only provide greater understanding of why the former struggled in its efforts to engage the latter but, additionally, by working with the theoretical lexicon developed by Chan, Goldthorpe and the CRESC, the following work will outline a new approach to access that addresses the problems detailed above and so offers workable alternatives for the future.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* and the Study of Cultural Consumption

Pierre Bourdieu's research project can most accurately be described as a prolonged exploration of power in French society. Across a range of texts, including *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, *The Field of Cultural Production*, *Distinction* and *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu explored how power was created, controlled, used and what effect these processes had on people at differing levels of the socio-economic structure. Working in an interdisciplinary mode that merged empirical research with theoretically rich interpretive models, Bourdieu pitched *his* sociology as a way of 'transcend[ing] the "compulsory" and "ritual" choice between subjectivism and objectivism' and emphasised that all theories were best understood as thinking tools to be applied and refined

through practice.²⁷⁶ Only by working in this fashion would sociologists be able to nurture evolving understandings of changing sociological phenomena. Though these pronouncements illuminate Bourdieu's tendency towards attention grabbing self-aggrandisement, it would be unfair to suggest that his articulation of this thinking tools approach was merely bluster. Bourdieu made some significant contributions to sociology in the latter half of the 20th century and, with *Distinction*, possibly provided the single most 'important monograph of post-war sociology'.²⁷⁷ His ongoing thinking on the various forms of capital (the idea that all forms social interaction can be considered as a processes of exchange in which some are rich and some are poor in economic, cultural, symbolic and personal resources), fields (the idea that culture is the site and means of battles over status and wealth) and habitus (the idea that a feel for the game of society is learnt from an early age) have been hailed as transformative to the discipline and, in testament to their durability and the appeal of Bourdieu's ethos, have been frequently adapted outside of their initial context. Cultural capital, for instance, is often removed from its original educational setting and positioned as a valuable resource in discussions of the art and culture sector.

Such a move is one that this thesis takes advantage of, therefore the literature review developed here will not offer a career spanning overview.²⁷⁸ Instead, focusing in detail on Bourdieu's writings on cultural production and consumption, notably *Distinction*, this literature review will unpack the potential insights and complexities offered by Bourdieu's cultural thought. It will then introduce responses to Bourdieu that have been articulated in the recent British context, illuminating the commonalities and contrasts between more recent works before using the discussion of the credibility and clashes between these texts as an effective springboard into the consideration of the challenges of increasing public access to the arts.

Distinction was published in 1979 and translated into English in 1984. It is the product of Multiple Correspondence Analysis of survey work conducted throughout the 1960s in France. The text is a critique of the Kantian aesthetic philosophy which suggested that the appreciation of beauty, natural or cultural, was reliant on a disinterested and universal aesthetic sense. Writing in a thorough but sprawling fashion, Bourdieu argued that every cultural choice an individual makes (whether for films, furniture or food) is informed by their class position. These positions are not evenly or uniformly distributed throughout society. Children born at different times, in different areas and to different families will have different experiences and opportunities. Consequently, each child's taste, their aesthetic sense, will develop in different ways. Thus, the idea that there is a

²⁷⁶ Richard Jenkins, *Key Sociologists: Pierre Bourdieu*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 66

²⁷⁷ Tony Bennett et al., *Culture, Class, Distinction*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 9

²⁷⁸ For an overview of Bourdieu's career and a wider discussion of the development of his ideas please see the following texts as they offer an accessible and informative research primer for more detailed analysis; *Pierre Bourdieu: Agent Provocateur* by Michael Grenfell, *Key Sociologists: Pierre Bourdieu* by Richard Jenkins and *Locating Bourdieu* by Deborah Reed-Danahay

singular “good” taste and that an appreciation of aesthetic quality is in some way inevitable is a flawed one. That this idea persists in social thought is not an accident per Bourdieu’s reasoning.²⁷⁹ He suggests that there is a clear correlation, a homology, between the higher class positions and the “legitimate” and revered cultural practices which are regularly celebrated as examples of the pure, ideal aesthetic; classical music, the visual arts, high drama and ballet.

Given that class relations are unequal socially, with the upper classes dominating the lower in economic and political ways, this homology leads to a form of cultural dominance. Bourdieu suggests that the higher classes use their position of power to propagate the idea that their preferred culture is the highest culture and, in doing so, preserve their cultural wealth (or capital) and ensure the reproduction of the socio-cultural structure in which they are dominant. The means they utilise to do this are numerous. Most famously, Bourdieu theorised the transference of cultural capital between generations through a rigged education system which builds on the cultural values of higher class children. These values, such as an appreciation of learning and recognition of “quality” art, are taught to higher class children through familial interaction at an early age and very quickly become embedded, influential but unnoticed. Bourdieu describes this process as the formation of the habitus, understood as an almost intuitive sense of the “correct” way of behaving. The habitus of working class children, in Bourdieu’s reasoning, is different. Informed by the necessities of working class life, it holds the value of education and cultural appreciation in lower regard, alternatively emphasising the importance of more immediately rewarding, practical and thrifty approaches to life. Consequently, the leaning of the educational system towards one habitus but not the other ensures the skewed, but natural seeming, distribution of educational achievements which, in turn, leads to the reproduction of skewed social relationships in adult life. Higher class children tend to do better at school and so often get better jobs, establish more influential personal networks and have access to more “legitimate” cultural practices.²⁸⁰

Evaluating Bourdieu

This proposition that the higher classes utilised the cultural fields of art and education to transmit resources to each other and their children and so fuel a violent but veiled process of status preservation and social reproduction marked a significant contribution to theories of cultural consumption by offering an empirically grounded challenge to the idea that art and culture are an apolitical aspect of society. Positively, *Distinction* provides a range of thinking tools that are as theoretically rich as other contest-oriented approaches to consumption and in many ways

²⁷⁹ As demonstration of the persistence of this kind of thinking see the *pure* language of Kant, the sweetness and light reasoning of Matthew Arnold or the possibilities of modernist art applauded by The Frankfurt School.

²⁸⁰ For a wider discussion on the nature of cultural capital and please see Bourdieu’s work in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* and *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*. Full details can be found in the bibliography of this thesis.

empirically stronger than those approaches. For instance, Bourdieu's unpacking of ideas of capital, field and habitus are just as theoretically rewarding as the philosophical musings of the Frankfurt School but the former are empirically stronger given their grounding in research into social reality. *Distinction*, then, can both be read as a significant theoretical development and a testament to the potential of interdisciplinary efforts.

However, despite these successes, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of *Distinction* and Bourdieu's wider work. These problems become apparent when the text is scrutinised on methodological, interpretative and temporal terms. Considering methodology, as much as Bourdieu pitched his work as a revolutionary advance in approach, *Distinction* falls prey to certain failings that more recent work with public surveys on cultural tastes have countered with some fairly straight forward adaptations. For instance, Bourdieu largely ignores popular culture in *Distinction* in a way that all the British analysts which follow do not. In doing so, he fails to account for a significant field in which cultural capital and status positions are at stake. The omission of the many Algerian and other African peoples living in France is another striking problem of Bourdieu's approach. Given the tendency for these groups to make up sizeable proportions of the working-class population, this oversight undermines the legitimacy of the claims that Bourdieu makes regarding culture and class relations as he is not drawing his conclusions from a full analysis. Admittedly, these gaps were part of the surveys that Bourdieu used, he did not actively construct them, and given his aim to create a social critique of Kantian philosophy the use of available, flawed resources was perhaps inevitable and might be treated with leniency. Yet, when it is considered that contemporary analysts have discovered similarly skewed resources and constructed ethnic booster sample surveys to rectify this issue, whilst Bourdieu fails to even acknowledge this gap on his way to developing totalising conclusions, then it becomes clear that such glaring omissions are unacceptable.

In *Distinction* and in other works, Bourdieu tends to be overbearing and dismissive of individual choice in his interpretations of data. The taste of the working-class for instance is uniformly described as 'of necessity'.²⁸¹ This description, commenting on the low freedom of choice experienced on low incomes and the consequent focus on practicalities, ignores the creative and aesthetic possibilities available within limited means and also the individual sense of pride in good housekeeping, regardless of status. Elsewhere, there is clear evidence that Bourdieu is keen to emphasise the *differences* between people ahead of more apparent similarities. Writing in 1998 in an article that explores underlying leanings in Bourdieu's work, Longhurst and Warde suggested that 'his approach tends to lead to a stress on the uncovering of variation in consumption practices rather than the parallel need to explain how commonalities and solidarities are forged between

²⁸¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 173

people’.²⁸² Thus, Bourdieu finds significant difference because that is what he is looking for. This is not to say that there are not significant differences between people but that this is not *all* that there is. In combination, these interpretive choices counter Bourdieu’s claims to plot a new course between objective structures and subjective will and, instead, force people into oppositional social boxes, effectively stripping them of agency and positioning them as pawns within an objective structure. This presents a simplified version of reality that certainly makes for attention grabbing claims but lacks the nuance required for truly insightful social analysis.

Finally, *Distinction* may offer insight into a particular moment in a particular place but it is difficult to take the text and apply its conclusions to a context out of time. In the case of this thesis, contemporary Britain does not easily compare to France of the 1960s. The modes of cultural production and consumption have altered through radical technological change, the expansion of tertiary education has opened new and different relations with legitimate culture, and the evolution of the class structure following large scale de-industrialisation and the development of a service economy has complicated the social stratifications of upper, middle and working class.

Taking this array of issues into account, it is evident that whilst Bourdieu’s project provides some provocative and inviting ideas these need to be built on carefully if they are to be of continued use. His thinking on culture as a personal resource, official structures of legitimation and the role of the habitus in providing some with a sense of ease and others a sense of isolation can all be useful tools with which to engage in a contemporary analysis of arts funding and the issue of access. The challenge is to utilise these tools in a way that avoids the questionable conclusions that Bourdieu draws. I describe this challenge as the need to divorce the mechanics of Bourdieu’s work from the ideological bindings of his thinking. Recent work on cultural consumption has responded to this challenge in interesting and varied ways. The initial articulation and ongoing development of cultural omnivore theory provides a strong example of the range of these responses.

Introducing the Cultural Omnivore Theory

The term cultural omnivore first appeared in 1992, eight years after the English translation of *Distinction*. It was coined by Richard Peterson and Albert Simkus following a study of musical tastes as recorded in *The Survey(s) of Public Participation in the Arts* in the United States from 1982 and 1992. It describes a pattern of cultural consumption in which individuals, contrary to the competitive model put forward by Bourdieu, did not choose their cultural activity in accordance with their class position and to distinguish themselves. Alternatively, they found that individuals who displayed an interest in the high arts ‘were not averse to participation in activities associated with

²⁸² Brian Longhurst and Alan Warde, “Social class, consumption and the influence of Bourdieu: Some Critical Observations” from *Consumption Matters*, 1998, p. 275

popular culture' and that conscious, snobbish position taking did not exist to a significant or trend-worthy degree.²⁸³ This central contrast (omnivore vs snob) has been explored and developed over time by a number of authors, with each iteration adding another strand to an increasingly complex theoretical web. To plot the development of this thinking and draw attention to the texts that have most directly informed my research it is useful to begin with a review of Peterson's 2005 article "Problems in Comparative Research: The example of omnivorousness". This work offers a comprehensive account of how the omnivore theory was first articulated and how it developed from that point.

Beginning by positioning his own discovery of the concept as the result of a test of Bourdieu's homology argument, Peterson goes on to outline how his early work undermined the high/low distinctions of Bourdieu with the evidenced suggestions of an omnivorous/univorous split in the public's cultural consumption patterns. This split, informed but not dictated by social factors such as education, marked the divide between those who engaged with various forms of culture (omnivores with high and low tastes) and those who engaged with a more limited range (univores with low tastes). The significance here was that respondents, in either group, generally didn't position high cultural forms as worthy of especial merit or as indicators of significant cultural wealth. Instead, 'cultural capital was seen by many high-status US respondents as the ability to appreciate the distinctive aesthetic of a wide range of cultural forms, including not only the fine arts but a range of popular and folk expressions as well'.²⁸⁴ Given that the decade between Peterson's survey materials had seen the fall of Russian communism, the rise of neoliberalism with its emphasis on individual satisfactions, and the continuing development of the postmodern challenge to traditional cultural narratives, the identification of such selective sentiment is not necessarily surprising. Yet as a result of being the first significant work to illuminate this sentiment and offer a provocative challenge to the dominant Bourdieuan model, this inaugural omnivorous work acted as a prompt for researchers all over the world to test the veracity of Peterson's claims.

Since 1992, the omnivore theory has appeared in works of cultural sociology in countries as varied as America, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Israel, Spain, Sweden and the UK. This range of iterations has led to an expansion of the meanings of the initial term, beyond snob vs inclusive, and the creation of new characterisations of consumption within the discourse. Omnivores and univores have been joined by paucivores and they have been countered by inactives. They have all been qualified by considerations of volume of attendance or

²⁸³ Alan Warde, David Wright, Modesto Gayo-Cal, "Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, the Myth of the Cultural Omnivore" from *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 1, (2007), p. 144.

²⁸⁴ Richard A. Peterson, "Problems in comparative Research: The example of Omnivorousness" from *Poetics* 33 (2005), p. 260

participation and interrogated through discussions over whether it is sufficient to recognise taste as an expression of personal liking or whether it must be measured via what people actually do.

Given this diversity, Peterson's 2005 retrospective is useful as it draws out what the benefits of this evolving omnivore theory are and what it needs to be wary of. He calls for a formal expansion in the scope of research and the dethroning of high culture from its safe space of interest as the long-established status markers no longer carry the same weight. Discussing music, the ultimate accolade for Bourdieu, Peterson is quick to point out that technological advancement has meant that all kinds of music have become cheaper, more readily accessible and so rendered less distinct. Elsewhere, he calls for the use of labels in a fluid way, not as catch-all explanations but as umbrella terms within which there may be 'several distinct patterns of omnivorous inclusion and exclusion', for instance, or a univorous individual that is highly engaged but in a very specific form.²⁸⁵ Finally, he stresses that it is important for researchers to acknowledge that omnivore theory will ultimately atrophy in favour of a different approach as patterns of cultural consumption change or research into culture, consumption and status develops in new directions. However, he does not put a clear time-frame on this and in plotting the history of the theory, its challenges and potential, Peterson provides a thorough, accessible and rightly lauded article that offers an effective introduction to the development of the omnivore theory overall and the trajectory of its UK branch.

Cultural Consumption Theory in the British Context

The UK approach can broadly be divided into two lines of enquiry, that of Tak Wing Chan and John H. Goldthorpe and that of Tony Bennett, Mike Savage and their colleagues at the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC). These strands of research, though not entirely oppositional, do differ in their development of the omnivore theory, particularly in their positioning of Bourdieu's terminology and ideas within that theory. Broadly, Chan and Goldthorpe's argument is less accepting of Bourdieu, with Goldthorpe going to exemplary lengths to unpack the dangers of using his work.²⁸⁶ The researchers of the CRESC are more forgiving of Bourdieu's flaws and adapt his ideas, particularly the role of habitus and the mechanics of capital, into their work on omnivorousness. This critical back and forth does not do terminal damage to either side; both Chan and Goldthorpe and the CRESC produce several works that offer detailed readings of current cultural consumption patterns. What this debate does, though, is demonstrate the importance of assessing the various strands of omnivore theory to gauge their suitability for application in this thesis.

Between 2005 and 2007 Chan and Goldthorpe utilised data provided by the *Arts in England* survey and coupled it with public interviews to explore patterns of cultural participation in three

²⁸⁵ Peterson, p. 264

²⁸⁶ See his 2007 critique "'Cultural Capital': Some Critical Observations" for a strong example of this, it will also be discussed below.

articles; “The social stratification of Theatre, Dance and Cinema Attendance” (2005), “Social Stratification and Cultural Consumption: Music in England” (2006) and Social Stratification and Cultural Consumption: The Visual Arts in England” (2007).²⁸⁷ They concluded, in each case, that the claims of homologous consumption and the alternative approach of complete individualisation simply did not match the complexities of reality. However, whilst they broadly sided with the omnivore thesis of Peterson they challenged the initial suggestion of a snob vs. inclusive arrangement. In their work on cinema and theatre they pointed out that, if cinema were removed from the survey, most respondents would become non-attenders in this area of culture. In the visual arts, they identified a previously unacknowledged paucivorous class who liked a lot of a little range of painting (Turner and Van Gogh being popular choices) but did not profess to being adventurous or expert. In music, they demonstrated the impact of technology on consumption and documented how many people may qualify as omnivore listeners (lots of music at home), yet few would qualify as omnivore attenders. Each of these points contributed to greater understandings of cultural consumption and opened larger questions on cultural practice for future research. How can we assess someone’s cultural interests, is it enough to profess a liking for something or must it be done and does it matter how and when you do it? How do we assess the role of social change in the conference of status on cultural forms? Why are policy makers interested in a fairly limited range of forms when cultural practices are becoming increasingly diverse?

The development of these more layered readings and prompts for future work has several positives. The omnivore argument of Chan and Goldthorpe doesn’t get derailed by the deterministic bent of Bourdieu’s thought, nor does it get lost in the utopian aspects of the individualisation argument. Instead, it shows that within the possibilities made available by social structures (using educational, geographical and gendered models) individuals make choices and, whilst some of these may lead to patterns, these patterns are not distinct enough to suggest the influence of an overarching social agenda. As respondents to Peterson and Simkus, they also do an excellent job of acknowledging their position in a tradition, valuing the initial omnivore theory but challenging it in a way that offers new language, analysis and conclusions. The paradoxical effect of this is to undermine the position of the omnivore class within the argument (it is a minority population even where they are most likely to be) but ultimately strengthen the claims of the kind of work operating under the umbrellas of the omnivore theory by showcasing the potential of this work to develop reflexive, nuanced readings. Finally, in the connections and discrepancies that can be read between each case study, the articles of Chan and Goldthorpe showcase the need for cross formal analysis,

²⁸⁷ The *Arts in England* survey was conducted by a branch of the ONS, on behalf of ACE in 2001. It was concerned with ‘obtaining factual information on the nature and extent of individuals’ participation in cultural events and activities’. For full details on this text, and on Chan and Goldthorpe’s three articles, please see bibliography.

something which they explicitly address at the close of their article on the visual arts with the call for a totalising study of cultural consumption in the future.

A problem with Chan and Goldthorpe's articles, though, is the reluctance to acknowledge the possibility of a status structure. Certainly, their criticisms of Bourdieu's homology argument are well founded and I'm not suggesting a reversion to an understanding that frames cultural consumption as a battleground between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, it is important to recognise that whilst Chan and Goldthorpe discovered that most people do not try to exert themselves in a class-based status game or feel pained by the sting of a distinctive cultural hierarchy, this does not mean that some form of status game is not being played around and upon them. Looking to the contemporary British example, it is clear from the formal focus of cultural policies, the manner of public expenditure and the comments of some public respondents to qualitative Arts Council research that there is certainly an officially valued culture. This culture, dubbed "'the arts'" by critics, consists of a limited range of forms that dominate the fields of education and publicly subsidised practice.²⁸⁸ Interestingly, during the period of study for this thesis, this dominance does not immediately appear as an oppressive tool in a Bourdieuan class conflict. Instead, a clear characteristic of the recent New Labour cultural agenda was the emphasis on officially backed culture as catalyst for personal and social change, a means through which *everyone* could gain. Such emphasis is certainly hopeful and it was supported by a number of affirmative (but questionable) studies that testified to its potential.²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, even this positive emphasis demonstrates a clear value structure with a particular kind of success, literally measured by New Labour's Public Service Agreements, in mind. Acknowledging this, the weakness of Chan and Goldthorpe, is that by moving away from Bourdieu and focusing in more detail on the interconnectedness of individual choice(s) in the formation of participation patterns they are too quickly dismissive of status as social marker and lose a degree of structural perspective. This perspective is crucial when dealing with larger organisations such as Arts Council England or the government. Without it, studies run the risk of missing the influential agendas that frame and permeate an individual's choices. In this case, Chan and Goldthorpe's work would struggle to identify the paternalistic cultural push that was happening in parallel to the choices of their respondents and the effect (if any) that this push had upon those choices.

²⁸⁸ Creative Research, p. 40

²⁸⁹ See Francois Matarasso's *Use or Ornament* and its case studies on the power of participation for a strong example of this instrumental and socially improving research. Full details in bibliography.

The Alternative Offer, The CRESC and Adaptation

This status game, and the structural relations it points to, do not go unnoticed by the CRESC because they have a more flexible relationship with Bourdieu. Writing on his legacy in 2010, Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde suggest that the CRESC opted for a 'partial appropriation [of Bourdieu], where some parts of the theoretical and methodological corpus is accepted and then applied, along with other concepts or approaches, to offer empirically based explanations' to sociological questions on cultural consumption.²⁹⁰ This partial appropriation centred on an adaptation of the mechanics of cultural capital theory. Going further than the 'reduction of particular, narrowly defined cultural states to various socio-economic determinants' of Bourdieuan theory, they emphasised the necessity of developing an approach in their work that enabled respondents to unpack their understanding of taste, cultural knowledge and participation in their own terms.²⁹¹ This personal input granted researchers insight into the valuation processes of respondents, prompted consideration of the social perception of cultural choices and showcased reflections of the respondent on their own position. These personal inputs were frequently coupled with the statistical analysis of survey data in a way that combined the individual workings of choice with social indicators, thereby generating an analysis that effectively positioned the individual within an evident socio-cultural structure. By working in this way, the CRESC not only surpassed Bourdieu but they went further than Chan and Goldthorpe whose trilogy of articles, by focusing strictly on participation, failed to interrogate the perceptions of cultural practice and so lost insight into the differing social value of various cultural forms.

With this methodology, the CRESC generated a prolific output covering the recent UK context. These examinations include the analysis of cultural activities, for instance Warde's discussion of dining out (1995) and his and Gayo-Cal's breakdown of the anatomy of cultural omnivores (2009). They also offer reflections on central theoretical joists, such as Warde and Longhurst's work on class and consumption (1998), Savage, Warde and Devine's work on capital assets and resources (2005) and Prieur and Savage's work on the challenges of updating capital theory (2011). Finally, this school provides new structural readings of consumption patterns and capital value, including the CRESC working paper series (2005), Warde, Wright and Gayo-Cal's discussion of the myth of cultural omnivores (2007) and the variety of readings offered in the school's seminal publication *Culture, Class and Distinction* (2009).²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde, *Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu's Legacy: Settling Accounts and Developing Alternatives*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 10-11

²⁹¹ Mike Savage et al., "Cultural Capital in the UK: a preliminary report using correspondence analysis (working paper no. 4)" from *CRESC Working Paper Series*, (CRESC: Manchester, 2005), P. 12

²⁹² See bibliography for full details and further examples

The cumulative effect of all this work was to articulate the critical suggestion that whilst omnivorous consumption may be on the rise, it is in no way the dominant model of consumption in the UK. Pushing further than Chan and Goldthorpe who drew a similar conclusion, the CRESC went on to suggest that the omnivorous identity, though recently emergent, is not free from status contests. The 'clustering of cultural taste' in the UK illustrates clear distinctions between people and the valuation of cultural forms.²⁹³ However, these distinctions do not correlate with the established Bourdieuan ones, they are more complicated. For instance, classical music has become increasingly mainstream, whilst heavy metal remains widely denounced but evangelically celebrated by a few. Elsewhere, the import of high quality American drama has seen the elevation of television to an art while reality TV has become widely derided as trash. Finally, the study of attitudes towards, and patterns of, reading indicate common interests in classic novels (high art) and children's literature (low art). Nevertheless, whilst overt, class-based snobbishness has declined, there are still certain forms of culture and approaches to consumption that are more highly regarded than others. This indicates that whilst the character of capital relations may have changed, the understanding of cultural practice as a resource to be utilised in a competitive field remains. Explicitly, this new model of cultural wealth is grounded in the idea that the culturally affluent are those who are open to most things but who also show a discernment in their choices. To draw on examples utilised by the CRESC, it is valuable to express a shared liking for and knowledge of the works of Jane Austen and JK Rowling but also to distance oneself from *Big Brother*.

This reading refutes the homology argument and complicates the claims of Chan and Goldthorpe by demonstrating that individual choice still operates within, and helps perpetuate, an uneven cultural economy. By demonstrating this across their numerous articles, the authors of the CRESC use Bourdieu in a way that enables the creation of new readings of cultural consumption and the consequent utilisation of those readings in the development of new understandings of social structures. The reach of their claims is never total and, in fact, they are explicit about the limits of their work in many instances, pointing to the limitations of the first-time use of data sets and the struggles of keeping up with a rapidly developing cultural milieu. Yet, by working in this new, hybrid way, they ultimately offer a means of more clearly identifying social patterns, better illuminating the complicated nature of personal choice and so provide an assured basis from which the interrogation of the possibilities and limits of cultural access policy might be conducted.

²⁹³ Savage et al., "Cultural Capital in the UK: a preliminary report using correspondence analysis (working paper no. 4)", p. 12

The Challenge to the CRESC & Contemporary Responses

This adaptation of Bourdieu's work is critiqued by Chan and Goldthorpe on a number of occasions, most explicitly in Goldthorpe's "Cultural Capital: Some Critical Observations" from 2007. Here, Goldthorpe proposes, in a guarded but articulate manner, that any adaptation of Bourdieu's cultural analysis ignores the fundamental flaw in his work; that he can either be read as Bourdieu domesticated or Bourdieu wild and is not very useful in either case. Bourdieu domesticated is a sociologist of education who explores the connections between class and status position to explain patterns of achievement. Bourdieu wild is a revolutionary thinker who uses a study of class, status and educational attainment as the foundation for a 'new conceptual and theoretical approach' to hierarchy that is grounded on the idea of social reproduction and the parallel necessity of accumulating and transmitting capital.²⁹⁴

The former characterisation is more acceptable but less useful because, whilst Bourdieu might offer an accurate depiction of education in France in the 1960s, it is important to acknowledge that empirical conditions in the UK in the 21st century are markedly different. Therefore the application of the work as an explanation of current educational performance is not viable. The latter characterisation is more problematic because, as much as it lays claim to long-term insight into wider social processes, these claims are based on evidently shaky empirical foundations and are limited by interpretive and ideological blinkers. Simply, there have been significant social changes since the 1960s, both in France and globally, which indicate that Bourdieu's thinking on social reproduction was flawed and that his commitment to it was damagingly excessive. Some strong examples of this problematic fixity include the suggestions that schools work to recreate current capital relations but that they seemingly cannot create new capital, that the habitus is overbearing and inescapable with people unable to learn new rules for new social games, and that class positions do not allow for individual differences of taste. Drawing on these and similar problems, Goldthorpe goes on to argue that such limited understandings are not effectively dealt with by the CRESC and, in fact, 'they show some uncomfortable recognition' of the validity of such criticisms whilst still using a form of cultural capital theory as a central component in their work.²⁹⁵ This paradox is accounted for by Goldthorpe as an 'undercover attempt to rescue Bourdieu' by using his theory in relative terms.²⁹⁶ This is illegitimate because it keeps the useful and dismisses the unhelpful in a way that fails to recognise the connection between the two. Though highlighting the potential hazards of utilising and adapting Bourdieu, I would argue that Goldthorpe's critique is flawed in the extent to which it suggests an inseparable connection between cultural capital theory and the reproduction of the

²⁹⁴ John H. Goldthorpe, "Cultural Capital: Some Critical Observations" from *Sociologica* vol. 2 (2007), p. 11

²⁹⁵ Goldthorpe, p. 18

²⁹⁶ Goldthorpe, p. 17

bourgeois social order. Moreover, in the suggestions he makes about the reasoning of the CRESC he ignores the rigor and quality of thinking that goes into their adaptations.

Two years after this critical shot, the authors of the CRESC offered a thorough response to Goldthorpe in *Culture, Class and Distinction* (2009). It is an articulate attempt to move the Bourdieuan tradition forward through a lengthy, detailed and reflexive application of the materials within that tradition. The authors begin with a consideration of Bourdieu's most significant problems. Drawing attention first to the conception of the relational quality between social position and cultural value, they suggest that though they appreciate this perspective, the central claim of class as definitive influence is too simple and it misses the multi-dimensional connections between social position (informed by education, location, familial interaction, gender and age) and cultural taste. Acknowledging these more complicated patterns led them, secondly, to dismiss Bourdieu's conception of the habitus as a unifying rule book that can easily be picked up and used by someone, provided they have the correct class identity. This in turn led to the final, and most significant criticism of Bourdieu's work, that his understanding of capital which is 'examined more-or-less exclusively' as a resource distributed via class networks is too blinkered.²⁹⁷ From this assured critical base, the CRESC go on to outline an alternative approach that responds to Goldthorpe's criticism by acknowledging the value of perspectival insights offered by Bourdieu's theory but altering the mechanics of it in new ways. 'Taking Bourdieu's account of the habitus as a point of entry, we contest his view that habitus are necessarily unified, favouring a more dispersed and plural approach to person formation. This allows the disaggregation of the concept of cultural capital from the singular [oppositional] class logic governing Bourdieu's account' and fosters a recognition that, whilst it is a powerful resource in an uneven economy, cultural capital can be accrued, spent and valued in a variety of ways.²⁹⁸ For instance, the capital that empowers a teenager in London on the grime music scene will be different from the capital effectively spent by middle aged opera lovers in the same city. Therefore, rather than being dismissed outright, it should be considered in new ways. This theoretical development is matched by a number of methodological developments. The Multi-Correspondence Analysis favoured in *Distinction* is here bolstered by quantitative improvements (ethnic minority booster samples) and the acceptance of the significance of popular culture. Additionally, the authors use informal interviews from a representative sample of their respondents to interrogate the reasoning behind people's choices.

The analysis of *Culture, Class and Distinction* thus creates a space of consumption in which each respondent's position (determined by *their* socially contingent choice) is marked and placed in relation to others based upon their responses. This positioning grants insight into the similarities and

²⁹⁷ Bennett et al., *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p. 3

²⁹⁸ Bennett et al., *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p. 25

differences in what people do, how often they do it, why they do it and – interestingly – how they feel about the things that they don't do. The value of this is that it illuminates decision making at a personal level that also casts light on the affective impact of numerous social factors on matters of taste or participatory preference across cultural forms. It also shows how these individual choices contribute to social trends and enables respondents to articulate some thoughts on these trends. In this way, this central CRESO text is of further use to this thesis as it provides additional information on some of the key battle grounds in cultural access policy and so offers further insight into the extent of the challenges faced by the Arts Council.

Given all of this, it is unfair to suggest that the CRESO are guilty of attempting a stealthy rescue of Bourdieu or simply letting him off the hook. More accurately, they explicitly excise the workable elements, what I earlier described as the mechanics of his *Distinction* thesis, and move them into a 'looser, more pliable and contingent set of relations' that acknowledge the social impact on cultural practice (and vice versa) without falling prey to the deterministic tendencies of the earlier author.²⁹⁹ The ultimate effect is that by the book's close Bennett et al offer a range of coherent, well-researched conclusions that have acted as significant primers to my thinking for this chapter. Explicitly, they suggested:

- Cultural capital exists and works to separate people but it is not inherently tied to legitimate cultural forms or a class-based status structure.
- Omnivorousness is a selective and complicated approach and whilst omnivores generally showcase an acceptance of most things they *can* be judgemental. The broad dismissal of reality television and a tendency to have an over-representative amount of high cultural practices in their personal portfolios indicate the persistence of a selective understanding of valuable culture so it is important not to fall into the idealised readings that initially pitched omnivorousness as an openness to everything.
- Finally, whilst most people are disengaged from official culture, they are not necessarily the victims of exclusion and are more than capable of getting their cultural enjoyments and edifications from other sources; informal culture (hobbies), familial culture (events) and popular culture (television). This is something that needs to be acknowledged and explored more by policy makers and researchers who would do well to broaden the scope of their enquiries.

Having examined the central tenets and the critical back and forth between these two lines of enquiry from the recent British context, I have opted to utilise a parallel and selective application

²⁹⁹ Bennett et al., *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p. 36

of these ideas in the further examination of Arts Council England materials. This combination provides a clear language through which to characterise cultural consumption and an analytical approach which means that the social significance of that consumption does not get lost. For instance, the work of Chan and Goldthorpe is excellent at identifying patterns and creating strong characterisations of the different forms of cultural participation. Their discussions of the nature of paucivorousness, for example, or the need to recognise that omnivorousness should not be defined by attendance alone, provides a concise and well-reasoned vocabulary that can be effectively applied to wider discussions. However, due to their limiting focus on attendance and an unwillingness to consider the significance of status, their work lacks a social and political edge that is necessary when considering something as charged as public policy. Therefore, the simultaneous application of the work of CRESC will be useful as they effectively problematise the apolitical tendencies of the omnivore thesis and position consumption in a relational analysis that reveals the nuanced nature of cultural practices as valuable resources in contemporary social structure. Utilising the work of both, thus enables me to bring the characteristic and the politically significant together in a theoretically robust interrogation of the cultural choices and values of the public (as documented above) and examine how those choices and values connect and contrast with the approach of Arts Council access policy, thereby illuminating some of the reasons for its struggles, despite increased governmental interest.

The Two Paucivores & The Challenge of Change

Beginning with an adaptation of Chan and Goldthorpe's work, I suggest that both the Arts Council and the public can be described as paucivorous in their approaches to cultural practice and consumption. This term describes those who engage with 'not all or just one form of what is on offer but, rather modest amounts within a somewhat limited range of possibilities'.³⁰⁰ In its initial application as part of a study of engagement with the visual arts, this term correlated with a significant proportion of the public sample (34%) who were neither omnivorous nor univorous. This group showed a tendency to visit museums and galleries and were not averse, though were less likely than omnivores, to go to specific arts exhibitions. Later work by authors of the CRESC discovered a similar propensity for numerous consumers to have relatively fixed and strong preferences in this field, testifying to liking certain types of art and artists at a much higher rate than other types of art or artists.³⁰¹ Landscape paintings are singled out as a popular type (most liked by 47.3%) and canonical artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and JMW Turner are the most popular, liked by 67.2% and 50.5% respectively. Comparatively, 39.6% expressed a particular dislike of modern art

³⁰⁰ Chan and Goldthorpe, "Social Stratification and cultural consumption: The Visual Arts in England" in *Poetics* vol. 35 (2007), p. 176

³⁰¹ See Bennett et al, *Cultural Capital and the Cultural Field in Contemporary Britain (Working Paper Number 3)*, (Manchester: CRESC, 2005)

and, unsurprisingly given this, Tracey Emin and Frida Kahlo fared worst as artists, being the most liked by only 2.9% and 3.9% of the population, respectively. This combination of findings effectively strengthens the paucivorous hypothesis, that a selective but engaged group is making choices within a range of forms that they feel comfortable with.

Though initially developed in the field of the visual arts, this term can be effectively applied to nurture better understandings of the practices of the Arts Council and the public in this period. In the case of the Arts Council, their paucivorousness is evident in a number of ways. The organisation's dominant financial commitment to a small range of forms, counted as seven by the authors of *The Arts Debate*, showcases the limited range of possibilities in which organisational efforts can have a direct impact. These forms, in turn, are not largely engaged with by the public, with the majority attending sporadically. Moreover, they make up a very small proportion of the cultural forms offered in the wider creative ecology. This testifies to the modest appeal of the Arts Council's practices at the point of consumption and to the modesty of the scale of their cultural offer to the public.

On their side, the public can be understood as paucivorous because they largely elect to engage with a limited range of cultural practices. Certainly, their list of what counts as art is expansive but the patterns of consumption indicate that, in practice, there are a few clear leaders in what people actually do. Television viewing, cinema visiting, listening to mediated pop music, reading at home and supporting children in cultural classes (such as dance or drama) are all leading examples. Even amongst these, levels of consumption vary and there are marked genre tastes that further narrows the range of possibilities and reveal a modesty of engagement. For instance, though 'going to see a film at the cinema or other venue was the most widespread activity' this only translated to a rate of 62.7% of the population going once in the last 12 months.³⁰² Elsewhere, 88.5% of the population had listened to mediated rock/pop music in the last four weeks as opposed to 16.3% who had listened to opera in the same period. Thus, as much as people claim to want to engage with art more, or as much as arguments might be made about how the top ends of these consumption levels might be considered voracious, it is evident that the public largely engage with a range of forms they are comfortable with (the limited possibilities) and, even then, are stringent in their cultural efforts (the modest amount), even if those efforts outstrip levels of engagement with the arts offered by the Arts Council.

When considered alongside one and other, these readings showcase two different examples of paucivorous identity and, though each is joined by certain commonalities of character, there are still clear distinctions between them. Specifically, both the public and the Arts Council operate within defined formal boundaries with clear and divergent preferences for particular cultural practices and

³⁰² Ann Bridgwood et al, *Focus on Cultural Diversity: the arts in England – attendance, participation and attitudes*, (London: ONS, 2003), p. 31

modes of engagement, and each makes little effective effort to reach out, cross over and engage with the preferred practices of their opposite. Such a territorial reading is different to that offered by Chan and Goldthorpe in their initial development of this theory. They were concerned with exploring the qualities and proportional levels of engagement of a range of different characters, rather than examining the differentiation of identities within characteristic categories. In effect, they were interested in inter-character relations over intra-character relations. Thus, they suggest that the key divide within the visual arts was between the inactive majority group (those who did nothing in the visual art sphere) and the combined omnivorous/paucivorous population who were rich in status, high(er) in engagement but low in number.

The difficulty of applying this idea to help understanding of the wider Arts Council and public relations is that these two bodies cannot be so cleanly divided. Rather than this binary theoretical split between cultural doers and non-doers, the relationship between these two paucivorous bodies has been shown to be more complex. Indeed, these bodies are engaging in culture in parallel. This means that rather than be connected through a singular, top-down status structure that positions one as “winning” and the other as “losing”, the relationship can better be understood as one in which *separate status structures* inform the choices of each group and whilst there may be moments of overlap between these structures, breeding conflict and oppositional posturing, this is not the same as a hierarchical ordering of characters within a single structure. This is a complicated idea and a marked development on the thinking of Chan and Goldthorpe so it needs some unpacking if its application in relation to the Arts Council and public practice is to be fully understood.

Beginning with the status structure of the Arts Council, it is important to recognise that this organisation in the period under consideration placed great value in many of the things that the public did not do and, at the same time, failed to recognise what the public did do as art or culture of value. The most lauded forms, those given the most money and trumpeted in the annual reviews as success stories were tied to long established formal traditions.³⁰³ These traditions require an aesthetic literacy to be understood and appreciated. This literacy is developed through the education system in which many of the Arts Council’s supported forms make up classes in the national curriculum (art, drama and music) and occupy prominent positions in extracurricular activities (school plays, concerts). This correlation between the work of the Arts Council and the wider processes of social training indicates that there is agreement across the public sector about what culture we teach and pass on to children. In effect, there is an officially sanctioned culture. The recognition of this is to render evident that, as much as New Labour’s cultural policy espoused an

³⁰³ Most supported forms were developed before the turn of the 20th century.

egalitarian ethos and made attempts to modernise the NDPBs of the state-supported cultural sector, the *official value of the arts* remained a very particular one throughout their administration. Explicitly, as much as the method of delivery might have been altered by new initiatives for priority groups, the top status markers from the Arts Council's perspective remained tied to long established, conservative notions of acceptable cultural practice that date back to the Bloomsbury aesthetic of John Maynard Keynes and the historical traditions that preceded him. This claim of an influential, underlying value is strengthened by a couple of examples which showcase the pervasiveness of this conservative status structure within the cultural policy and Arts Council arena. In the first, Chris Smith, writing in *Creative Britain*, makes some loaded assumptions about the affective potential of the arts for *all* people, tying the most profound experiences to a very particular range of forms; 'the deepest cultural experiences will frequently come, for all of us, from the heights of fine opera or the sweeping sounds of classical orchestra or the emotional torment of high drama'.³⁰⁴ In the second, primary research conducted for this thesis discovered that certain art makers, even ones who may appear as a perfect fit for the progressive New Labour agenda, were frustrated by the challenge of meeting fairly fixed ideas of excellence and, so, success from the Arts Council's perspective. Stephen Johnstone, a director of a communally engaged theatre company whose audience is made up of priority groups, comments that 'the sad thing about that is that the forms of experimentation and development and reaching out to audiences in different places that does go on always gets bracketed [...] a bracket that kind of goes "but it's not really proper art"'.³⁰⁵

The status structure that underpins public practice is, unsurprisingly, harder to pin down, given that the public is a far more varied body than the Arts Council or the education sector and has no overarching directives to shape it. Even so, there is evidence of consistent reasoning across public engagements, whatever form they manifest in, which indicates a shared value structure. As detailed above, the public's dominant reason for engagement in cultural practice was enjoyment, they also showed a clear preference for participation over passive consumption and there is a marked tendency to engage in cultural practices that are close to home (physically) or seen as part of domestic life (children's plays, amateur bands, community work). At the same time, the public dismissed the Arts Council arts as distant, aloof and, at best, a risk of time and money. This indicates that, for the public, the highest status cultural practices are those that are directly enjoyable, easy to do and safe (low cost, accessible location). The further a practice moves from those qualifications the less desirable and the lower in status it is perceived to be. The caustic description of theatre goers as 'geeks' provides clear evidence of this distinct, judgemental status structure in action.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Chris Smith, *Creative Britain*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) p. 4

³⁰⁵ Stephen Johnstone, See Interview in Appendix, p. 223

³⁰⁶ Alan Warde, "Does Taste Still Serve Power? The Fate of Distinction in Britain" in *Sociological* vol. 3 (2007), p. 14

Considering both analyses, I suggest that the valuation structures underlying each of these paucivorous characterisations can be described as an official value system and an agreeable value system. When brought together through questioning (like in the research above) or accidental overlap (the happening upon public or conceptual art) these alternative value systems may stimulate antagonistic reactions, revealing an underlying oppositional tension and a fractious relationship between the two. However, it is inaccurate to say that such antagonistic responses are indicative of an accepted hierarchy between these groups. Though it has certain advantages in the public sphere, officially valued culture does not necessarily dominate agreeably valued culture and as much as it is couched in a policy discourse that testifies to its civic contributions and the opportunities for personal betterment it offers, it is evident that most people simply do not care about it and are, therefore, not in thrall to it.

The reason for this separation is that the official value system and the agreeable value system each incorporate a wide variety of different habitus'. This term is taken from Bourdieu's sociology but has undergone significant development for its use here. Bourdieu's conception of habitus described the process in which an individual learned and came to embody a particular feel for the cultural game. In line with his wider homologous thesis, the habitus was tied to a person's class position. Therefore, the habitus developed by those in the working class was distinct from those in the middle class which, in turn, was distinct from those in the higher class. This process was fixed in Bourdieu's theory: once learned, a habitus was hard to shake off and it gave individuals particular patterns of behaviour that marked them as a certain type. In the competitive class society in which the bourgeois dominated, such fixed patterns of behaviour were telling and considered signs of either low status (proletarian habitus) or high status (bourgeois habitus).

In contrast to the fixed, distinct Bourdieuan understanding of the term, the CRESC consider the formation of habitus a more varied process. An individual's class position may certainly be a factor but the CRESC argue that a workable theory of habitus needs to recognise a more 'dispersed and plural approach to person formation'.³⁰⁷ This approach takes into account influential structural factors (education, economics, ethnicity), variable social factors (access to technology, development of cultural trends over time) and the impact of individual chance (agency and the unpredictability of choice) in a way that recognises that individuals form their identities through engagement with, and by learning the rules of, a variety of cultural practices of their choosing within a socially contingent range of possibilities. An individual does not, simply, develop a habitus through unstoppable osmosis connected to their socio-economic position but, rather, develops one through a fluctuating process of opportunity, interaction and embodiment. This shift of understanding, though not ignoring

³⁰⁷ Bennett, *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p. 25

influential social factors or the initial Bourdieuan sentiment of a feel for the game, allows for a subtlety of study that aids better understanding of 'cross over tastes and practices [as well as] dissonant and contradictory taste profiles'.³⁰⁸

In the case of official and agreeable culture, these more varied habitus' led to the development of different cultural economies, or, different cultural capital relations. Rather than a term that describes an individual's wealth and position in a single, hierarchical cultural economy, capital in this pluralised approach becomes 'disaggregated' from its Bourdieuan understanding.³⁰⁹ It remains a marker of wealth, certainly, but it serves as 'convenient umbrella terms for a range of different cultural assets rather than per the logic of a single capital form that operates in the same way across all class positions'. In each case, the knowledge, skills and wider valuation structures that render an individual culturally wealthy or poor are different. As exemplified above, those who engage in grime music or opera may both may lay claim to a cultural (particularly musical) wealth but that wealth is recognised as valuable in markedly different areas of practice.³¹⁰ In effect, rather than prop up a universally recognised currency that is unevenly distributed, this pluralised understanding of habitus' nurtures the recognition that there are myriad cultural currencies.

This suggestion of a range of cultural currencies provides one way of understanding why the Arts Council, even with the sizeable initiative undertaken in the period under consideration, struggled to increase access. At a fundamental level, the paucivorous organisation failed to recognise the wider variety of cultural wealth as wealth at all. The formal and spatial preferences of the paucivorous public were largely ignored or discounted by the Arts Council. In consequence, significant proportions of the population were dismissed as culturally inactive or, more drastically, rendered anti-engaged with culture when this is evidently not the case. This dismissive bracketing, built upon the blinkering effect of the official status structure, compromises any access policy from the outset. This is not to say that an access policy operating in accordance with this status structure will not have some successes (as detailed above there were some key improvements to infrastructure) but that it will fail to achieve and sustain high levels of public access long-term simply because the organisation is pushing a range of cultural forms that many people feel distanced from without taking adequate measures to address the factors behind that distance or, to return to the language of economics, spread the wealth necessary for the appreciation of these practices.

As evidence of this problem in practice, it is instructive to consider the *decibel* programme. *decibel* ran from May 2003 to May 2004 with a budget of £5 million and aimed to increase the recognition of diverse work, empower diverse artmakers and so as develop a many-voiced arts

³⁰⁸ Bennett, *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p. 28

³⁰⁹ Bennet, *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p. 29

³¹⁰ See page 25 for full details.

ecology. The end of programme report indicates a muddled implementation process but the wider evaluation shows that it met with some successes in its goals.³¹¹ More significantly, closing reflections revealed that whilst *'decibel'* was originally conceived as a celebratory programme [...it...] was eventually delivered not as a celebratory year, but as a catalyst for change and, more particularly, as an agent of change within the Arts Council itself'.³¹² In effect, the programme drew attention to one aspect of the challenge of public engagement (appealing to BME makers and audiences), addressed the issue to the extent that it could within the budget and timeframe allotted but also revealed that much more needed to be done as the general access policy in the current mode had largely failed to address this issue. As detailed above, despite sustained efforts, BME groups were much less likely to produce or attend Arts Council arts than their white counterparts. *decibel* thus demonstrated that whilst sporadic advances may be made when resources are concentrated for specific purposes, more general and sustained advances are difficult in the current mode because BME arts makers and audiences (much like most other demographics) do not find the arts of the Arts Council that appealing, regardless of how hard they are pushed. By showcasing this, the differing intent and results of *decibel* provides a striking illustration of the limitations of a well-intentioned, energetic but blinkered access policy.

One way of beginning to theorise a change, to bring these different paucivorous characters together is to develop CRESC ideas of different capital and currencies into a working access policy. The problems described above can, at root, be attributed to the operation of different currencies in parallel or alternative cultural economies. Consequently, the motor for change can be the development of, if not a single currency (which is counter to the varied habitus thinking), then the development of an exchange process. To continue the application of ideas and language from the CRESC approach, the Arts Council could strive to develop an omnivorous ethos in their access policy; 'an *openness* to appreciating everything' that allows for fruitful embraces and crossovers to take place.³¹³ This could mean a move towards supporting multiple forms at multiple levels of practice (professional/amateur) in multiple places, drawing on people's preference to participate close to home and acknowledging such engagement as *both* a result in itself and as a potential springboard into other forms of engagement. Such a move may appear like a significant ask considering that the public have largely been shown to be on a scale of ambivalent to oppositional, whilst the Arts Council have been found to be dismissive in their language and fairly rigid in their funding preferences. However, given the evidence that a formally-limited, demographically-focused

³¹¹ See breakdown of 8-point programme in TMPL Consultants, *decibel evaluation: key findings*, (London: Arts Council, 2005), pp. 7-10

³¹² TMPL Consultants, p. 2

³¹³ Peterson and Simkus, quoted in Warde "Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, The Myth of the Cultural Omnivore" in *Cultural Sociology* vol. 1 issue 2, 2007 p. 145

approach to public engagement isn't working despite sustained efforts, I suggest that a more significant change is necessary or can, at the least, be justifiably theorised.

Towards a Processual Access Policy

To be clear, in certain areas of their portfolio the Arts Council was moving in a more omnivorous direction between 1997 and 2008. The Annual Review from 2006, for example, celebrated the organisation's contributions to breakdancing, the mentoring of 'emerging rock and pop artists' and sizeable investment in Heart 'n Soul, a group led by artists with learning disabilities who work with similarly affected people.³¹⁴ However, this example stands in striking contrast to the ongoing commitment to the formally limited, spatially distant work of organisations that received large subsidies throughout this period and beyond. As recently as 2012/13, for instance, the three largest funded organisations in the country were still building based, located in London and between them took up just over 15% of total Arts Council England expenditure for that year.³¹⁵ Thus, it is accurate to say that any omnivorous turn is not yet largescale enough and more needs to be done if improvements to public engagement are to be made. One way to move forward would be to build on the strengths identified in this period and from these develop what I define as a *processual access policy*.

Beginning to unpack these strengths, the public were far more expansive in their discussions of what counts as art than the range covered by the Arts Council's funding structure. They offered 59 non-repetitive entries in *The Arts Debate*, including 14 from the low and, even, anti-engaged. Coupled with the higher attendance levels at popular cultural events, this breadth indicates that there is clearly a public taste for broadly cultural engagement. Elements of this range of taste was certainly bleeding into the established Arts Council forms in this period and supported venues were making efforts to broaden their programming, but more could be done to hasten this inclusive turn and this list provides a formal blueprint of where efforts might be concentrated.³¹⁶

Informing Change provides strong evidence of a public preference for participation in arts and cultural practice ahead of attendance. Rates of cultural participation are higher than attendance across all demographic factors, with educational qualification providing a particularly striking example. It was found that at a rate of once a month (twice as high a level than that required for voracious attendance), 17% of people with degrees and 5% of those with no qualifications attended

³¹⁴ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2006*, (London: ACE, 2006), p. 15

³¹⁵ For further details see, Arts Council England, *Arts Council England: Grant-in-aid and Lottery annual report and accounts 12/13*, (London: Arts Council England, 2013), p. 64, *The National Theatre Financial Statement 2013-14*, at [http://d1wf8hd6ovssje.cloudfront.net/documents/National Theatre Annual Report and Financial Statements 2013-14 v2.pdf](http://d1wf8hd6ovssje.cloudfront.net/documents/National%20Theatre%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Financial%20Statements%202013-14%20v2.pdf), ROH: *Annual Review 2012/13 Finance* at <http://www.roh.org.uk/articles/annual-review-2012-13-finance>, *English National Opera Summary Income and Expenditure Account Year Ended 31 March 2013* at <http://www.eno.org/enosummaryaccounts>, accessed January 2014

³¹⁶ For an insightful discussion of the value of popular programming in arts centres see Interview with Daniel Brine in the appendix, pp. 202-211

the arts. This indicates a disparity between these groups of almost 3.5 times and, again, showcases that even at the highest end of one of the most influential social factors levels of regular attendance remain low (less than one fifth). Comparatively, when public participation in cultural activity was considered on the same timescale, it was found that 42% of the highest qualified did it and 21% of the least qualified did it. These figures indicate not only a shrinking disparity between groups (two times) but a much higher level of engagement at both the highest and lowest ends of the scale (2.5 and 4 times higher than attendance rates, respectively). This suggests that not only does the public have a cultural awareness or interest but also a clear modal preference for engagement. This preference is so strong that Daniel Brine, Director at The Cambridge Junction Arts Centre, has suggested that in 'an ideal world [...] I would be saying that I would be engaging audiences in the process of making work, not the product, that I'd be getting audiences interested in how the artists work, how the artists think rather than just thinking, "I'm going to see a show". And that would be a way that we could redefine our organisation'.³¹⁷

Turning to *The Arts Debate*, it was discovered that the 'common view [of the public] was that their attitude and to an extent, tastes, had been moulded in childhood, perhaps by the interest in the arts of their parents or their family more generally and the opportunities they were given to take part in some art form or attendance at a performance'.³¹⁸ This led to the equally wide ranging idea that children needed to be hooked young if an access policy was to have a consistent and powerful impact. This public concern finds strong support in the statistical analysis conducted above. The influence of education (or lack of) on the willingness of the young to engage in culture has been shown to have a lasting affect and the impact of Creative Partnerships testifies to the appeal of deploying arts in a participatory fashion in educational contexts. These findings indicate that youth engagement is a demonstrably influential area, high in public interest that has, historically, been supported by some form of public policy. In combination, this makes clear that a revitalised access and education policy, developing in parallel, would be widely welcomed and has pre-existing templates to build on.

Finally, there was also a professed interest in amateur practice, either as a participant or as an attender. The appeal of this practice was in its low cost, closeness to home and the perceived ease of access. When discussing a local opera performance, a highly unpopular professional form, the public interviewed 'looked forward to and enjoyed it, in part because they felt no class barriers. There was no box office as such – they just had to phone someone's home number for tickets, the venue was not too grand and they had no worries that they would be out of their depth because

³¹⁷ Daniel Brine, p. 206

³¹⁸ Creative Research, p. 43

they would be there with people they knew or people like them'.³¹⁹ In unpacking this contrast I am not advocating a wholesale move to supporting amateur practice, but it is evident that amateur work provides strong, practical examples of how the significant material and psychological barriers that dog professional practice might be overcome. The informal booking methods, the clear identification of “people like us” and a comfort with the venue, all provide clear counters to significant public concerns. Consequently, the support of more amateur practice as either a potential stepping stone into “the arts” or as the model for the development of new communication techniques can serve as an effective catalyst for change.

This discussion of identified strengths indicates that the public would be well served by an Arts Council access policy that:

- *Underwent a sizeable formal expansion that incorporated many of the cultural practices that build on everyday interest, use and confidence.*
- *Provided opportunities with funded organisations for increased public participation in the arts making process*
- *Improved communication with schools and the Department of Education to develop and sustain more work with children as a key building block for long-term engagement*
- *Allocated larger portions of the budget to support the development of amateur practice at a national level and the incorporation of amateur communication techniques at a professional organisational level.*

Such a shift in the access policy would be useful for a number of reasons. It would address issues that affect all demographics rather than separate groups. In doing so, it would enable a more holistic approach to public engagement. This is not to gloss over the needs of particular groups and it is in no way a suggestion that budget provision be stripped from disabled or BME theatre companies. It is to make clear, though, that for the purposes of audience engagement, the overzealous commitment to a demographic policy (pushing “black” arts for black people, say) can have a harmful separating effect, as if dealing with entirely distinct problems, when there are notable commonalities between all those who don’t engage. This processual shift recognises the limitations of such a committed demographic approach and provides opportunity to move forward in a more joined up way that enables the better management of limited resources to support *how* all people are doing the arts rather than *who* is doing the arts.

This approach would also help refocus the attention of the Arts Council on the factors that they can more easily influence, given the remit and scope of their funding and practice. Improved

³¹⁹ Creative Research, p. 7

communication with the public on issues of cost and behaviour, increased opportunities for participation and the support of more popular work for instance, are all issues that can be quickly addressed by the Arts Council. In contrast, the influences on Arts Council policy between 1997 and 2008, including ‘the six targets [that] aimed at extending “social inclusiveness” throughout the DCMS domain’, often bound the organisation to issues that it could engage with but it could not fully resolve.³²⁰ Thinking about social inclusiveness, it is an umbrella term that incorporates many challenges; an individual’s income, their infrastructural connections, their age, their self-confidence and their cultural values amongst other things. In certain respects, the arts may be well suited to countering the problems caused by some of these challenges (self-confidence, say) and may help bring the individual into society. However, it is evident from their struggles to increase engagement with socially excluded groups between 2006 and 2008 that whatever impact the Arts Council had on the problem of social exclusion, the scope of the challenge dwarfed the organisation’s capabilities to solve it.³²¹ This is not to discredit their efforts, but it is to say that, when the drivers of an access approach are so markedly macro-social and instrumental there will be inevitable failures because, whilst the arts may be useful, they are evidently not a silver bullet for all social ills. Acknowledging this, this approach has the potential to help reframe organisational expectations, showcasing what the Arts Council can do and opening new ways for the government to recognise its value and social utility, without tying it to impossible goals that are shaped by factors outside of its control.

It is this approach, then, that I define as a processual access policy. In that, rather than identifying a particular formal concern (like in the regional theatre crisis of 2001) or a lack of engagement by a certain demographic (see *decibel*) and reacting by starting initiatives, setting targets or concentrating additional resources in a way that might address symptoms but struggle to deal with cause, the focus of the access policy is on addressing clearly identified and influential issues in the course of *how* people engage with culture and arts practice. It is this processual approach, that builds on identified strengths to counter current weaknesses that is key to unlocking the omnivorous turn, which would see the parallel paucivorous characters, status structures and cultural economies described above begin the fruitful process of exchange.

There is a danger that, powered by this processual approach to access, the omnivorous turn might lead to the strengthening of a singular status hierarchy, more in line with the Bourdieuan one outlined in *Distinction*. In the wider sociological literature, it is clearly supported that ‘omnivorousness is strongly associated with educational qualifications, higher social class, and

³²⁰ Hewison, p. 67

³²¹ See *Annual Review 09*, p. 53 for breakdown of baseline levels, organisational targets and actual attendance and participation levels from 2005-2008 with priority groups. Statistics indicate that whilst there were fluctuations in levels of engagement, shifting up or down by a percentage point or two, all targets were missed with all groups apart from in BME attendance.

identification with a dominant ethnic group'.³²² Applying this finding to the work on value structures developed above, an omnivorous individual or organisation is therefore more likely to engage in and celebrate the official cultural value than their paucivorous, univorous or inactive counterparts. This gives rise to the possibility that an omnivorous turn might lead to the further strengthening of support for official cultural value ahead of agreeable cultural value and, worse, the possibility that such a paternalistic move may be celebrated (and so strengthened) because it is couched in the language and intent of progress. It is the fear that expansive formal moves, efforts towards developing participation and the utilisation of confidence building communication techniques from amateur networks could, rather than serve as legitimisation for wider cultural practices and new modes of engagement, act as the first step on a ladder that leads *up* to attendance at formally narrow, spatially distant professional forms.

This challenge invites consideration of two further concerns over suitability of an omnivore turn in this period and its aftermath. These concerns can most aptly be identified as the potential political and economic problems posed by this move. In the later part of the period of study (between 2005 and 2008) the freezing of grants and the pressure on administration costs was starting to take effect. The 2005 annual review reports, 'we announced our funding to over 1,100 arts organisations for the three years 2005/06 to 2007/08. Because our grant-in-aid remains at £412 million each year'.³²³ Later, Alan Davey writes in his introduction to *Review 08* that 'I want to reduce the percentage of our budget we spend on ourselves by 15 percent, and put that money into the arts'.³²⁴ This tightening of the public purse strings increased following the recession of 2008 and the subsequent elections of the Conservative-Liberal coalition (2010) and the Conservative (2015) governments. In accordance with an austere approach to public policy, these administrations took more radical measures than New Labour. In addition to further trimming grant budgets and demanding staffing cutbacks, there were significant structural changes to the publicly supported arts and culture sector. Headline examples of this include the shuttering of the UK Film Council and the folding of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council into Arts Council England, both in 2011. This combination of increasing financial pressure, staffing reductions and organisational restructuring signals that there was little political support for an expansion in the publicly supported cultural sector in the latter context of this thesis or under the governments that followed. Consequently, any omnivorous move to bring more cultural practice into the policy field would likely be an uneasy proposition to make.

³²² Warde, Gayo-Cal, "The Anatomy of Cultural Omnivorousness: The case of the United Kingdom" in *Poetics* vol. 37, 2009, p. 123

³²³ Arts Council England, *Annual Review 2005*, (London: ACE, 2005) p. 33

³²⁴ Alan Davey, *Review 08*, (London: ACE, 2008), p. 5

As part of this political unease, there is also the question of cost and a wider economic concern. In the former case, there is the immediate query of whether it is advisable to develop an expansive new cultural policy that contains several untested forms and processes in a context of shrinking public services where every pound spent is pressured to bring return to the exchequer. In the latter, there is the larger theoretical question over the appropriate use of public money. This more expansive formal turn has the potential to bring cultural practices under the remit of public funding that are already well served by the private market place. Such a move prompts consideration of why the public should pay for something that is privately sustainable and fuels concerns over the continuing encroachment of market ethos into the public sphere, a growth that is not without problematic consequences.³²⁵ In this way, the very success of the forms welcomed by the omnivorous turn might ultimately serve as their undoing; they don't need to be brought under the remit of "the arts" budget because people are paying for them already. Though needing to be wary of these potential challenges, the dismissal of the proposed omnivorous turn on these theoretical, political and economic grounds is an alarmist response that misses not only viable counter measures but also some exciting possibilities.

Beginning by addressing the concern that the more open, omnivorous turn might mask a growth in paternalist logic and the resurgence of a Bourdieuan status hierarchy, it is useful to consider the description that characterises omnivores at the point of consumption; an openness to appreciating everything. This phrase alludes to a foundational level of acceptance and, if utilised as a guiding principle in the productive, policy context, it could help generate a broader discourse on cultural value and the appropriateness of public support. To be clear, this openness to appreciating everything should not be considered the same as *liking anything*. In line with the counters posed by the CRESC, a more omnivorous Arts Council may still be selective in their judgements, but in this new context these judgments may be debated in a larger conversational frame. This frame could be populated by experts from longstanding and new forms, drawing from the range of art and "the arts" which the public identified, and might even invite members of the public to the discussion – this being a clearly voiced request in research materials. This new group could develop an assessment structure (likely, a multi-perspective debate and peer review system) that recognised the shared importance of official and agreeable cultural values, the appeal of artistic product and artistic process, the rights of established and developing work and the value of different modes of communication and public outreach. Such a discourse would effectively counter characteristic concerns of omnivores tending to be white, wealthy, educated and with a disproportionately high interest in official cultural value. In this way, an omnivorous Arts Council could not only support a

³²⁵ For a larger discussion of this issue, please see the chapter on economics later in this thesis.

wider range of relevant work that the public evidently engage in but it could also address public concerns over demystification and a sense of ownership.

To be clear, the Arts Council has had moments of formal development and introduced new voices in the past; the relatively late embrace of photography as an art form in the 1960s and the recent acceptance of electronic arts indicate clear (though sporadic) attempts to diversify input and thinking at the policy formulation level. The value of using this omnivore descriptor as a guiding principle, though, is that it provides a theoretical framework to perform this more inviting work consistently and on a larger scale. In doing so, the problems presented by the dominant characteristics of omnivores may be effectively countered by the consumption practices of omnivores and so the omnivorous turn that enables the exchange of varied cultural capitals of the arts and public is preserved.

Regarding the challenge posed by the restrictive political climate of the latter day New Labour government and its post-recession successors, it is important to point out that a more expansive embrace of popular art forms provides an effective way of generating audiences and revenue. From interviews and secondary research there is compelling evidence that such a shift may pay for itself and also support other areas of arts organisations. Discussing the work of Cambridge Junction, Brine made clear that 'if you draw a very basic Ven diagram with popular culture, art and creative learning that's how we talk about our organisation. If we look at the popular culture programme, it's still by far the largest in terms of audience and money that goes through the organisation [...]. But we like to think that the three parts, at some point in the future, will be equal' and until then, the successes of the popular culture programme help support the development of art and creative learning work.³²⁶ In a context of shrinking state interest and radical cuts, this social enterprise model that utilises popular forms to give the public something they want whilst also helping the organisation to develop innovative arts and educational practice provides a strong counter to the overarching process of political disengagement, neutralising its immediate economic challenges and also responding to the wider task of nurturing a varied cultural ecology for the taxpayer.

Finally, turning to a more detailed consideration of the economic challenges of this omnivorous turn, it is important to recognise that just because the private market caters for certain cultural practices, it does not mean that more could not be made available through public support. As Brine states, 'I think we have to ask ourselves what culture is and if people are interested in popular music then why not put it on the stages?'³²⁷ Such a move could have several benefits. As has been shown, the programming of a wider range of popular forms has the potential to generate

³²⁶ Daniel Brine, p. 203

³²⁷ Daniel Brine, p. 208

larger audiences, leading to an economic dividend that recoups grant-in-aid expenditure, helps sustain the cultural ecology and provides the space and resources for more experimental work. It could also, at an underlying level, accelerate the move past the idea that the market place (understood as what people are willing to pay for) is a negative force in the cultural context. Certainly, there are excesses and not everything that is popular in the market place is of aesthetic quality but it is crucial to remember that just because something sells does not necessarily render it of less cultural merit.³²⁸ To hold with such thinking runs counter to the goal of access and public engagement. Indeed, given that the market place is one of the clearest barometers of what the public wants, to actively dismiss popular cultural practices on (questionable) grounds of quality may be defensible (though elitist) from an aesthetic perspective but cannot be justified when public outreach is held to be the goal. Any attempt to do so indicates that the mission is one of pushing access to a certain range of practices but not access to all, a significant and damning distinction. Bearing this counter in mind, but also wary of the dangers of a rampant market ethos, the challenge appears to be not removing the market mechanism from the state backed cultural sector but, rather, making it work most effectively for the public, policy makers and artists. An omnivorous turn, powered by a processual approach, that programmes for public interest and then uses the revenue and freedom afforded by that to generate a wider variety of forms and modes of engagement, thereby bringing together the agreeable and the official cultural value systems, may be one way of doing so.

It is with these counters in mind that I suggest that the Arts Council's omnivorous turn might be effectively realised and the goal of increased public access more easily reached. To demonstrate the potential of such an omnivorous, processual approach, I now offer a case study of Black Country Touring, whose 2006 performance *Apna Ghar* provides a strong example of some of the ways that processual practice can increase levels of public engagement with Arts Council backed organisations.

Black Country Touring: *Apna Ghar (Our Home)*, 2006

Black Country Touring was founded in 1997 and serves Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Supported by the Arts Council, it endeavours to bring high quality touring theatre and dance to the region, programme and develop relevant work with and for local people, and showcase it in accessible local spaces; 'a school, community centre, a local library or art gallery'.³²⁹ The community they serve, given its geographical location, is 'inevitably diverse' with high levels of BME populations, considerable pockets of socio-economic deprivation and patterns of low

³²⁸See *the Contribution of the arts and culture to the national economy* by Centre for Economic and Business Research, (London: CEBR, 2013) for a discussion of *War Horse*'s economic success that demonstrate the falsity of this negative correlation between popularity and quality.

³²⁹ Black Country Touring, About Us <http://bctouring.co.uk/who-we-are/>, accessed January 2017

educational attainment.³³⁰ On first impressions, it appears Black Country Touring is an exemplary company for New Labour's cultural agenda, engaging as it does with a range of priority groups. However, whilst it benefited from that government agenda in certain respects, Stephen Johnstone was clear to point out that any connections were a consequence of 'swimming in the same direction' and not the result of a conscious (or pressured) alteration by the organisation in their practice.³³¹ It did not engage with Asian communities, low income families and children because government said so. Black Country Touring did it because those groups are simply the local people whom that theatre serves. Given this, Johnstone acknowledges that the company certainly has a communally engaged approach that is grounded in 'making work out of public experience' but suggests that it would be inaccurate to describe it as applied or socially instrumental practice.³³² He stated fervently that 'I don't believe in art as social work but I do believe it is intrinsically tied to the fabric of society'.³³³ The distinction is that, as much as Black Country Touring may work with those in the locality and have social knock-on effects, the aims of the company are broadly artistic; personal expression, aesthetic outcomes and audience satisfaction.

Apna Ghar (Our Home) ran for 3 days with two performances a day in June 2006. It was part of Black Country Touring's *reSonAte* project which ran from May 2005 to April 2008. This programme aimed for the 'creation of relevant and inspirational performance product' that crossed theatre, dance and comedy forms and gave voice to the range of South Asian experiences in the area.³³⁴ However, though it had a 'South Asian starting point it communicate[d] much more widely to audiences' because it explored a range of relatable issues; domestic relations, intergenerational histories and fault lines within communities.³³⁵ It was a site-specific promenade piece that used public generated content as inspiration for a performance that explored South Asian domestic experience through theatre and dance practice. The production process began with two training days for local women that covered oral history collection techniques. This led to 18 interviews which generated material for production. This material was shaped in the rehearsal process by professional theatre and dance workers (directors, choreographers and performers) alongside '51 community performers: 36 school children, a group of 8 SA Punjabi women (aged 60+) from Smethwick-Tandrosti: and 7 individuals'.³³⁶ It was advertised across a range of media, appearing on five websites, four radio programmes and three publications, each of which reached local or national audiences.

³³⁰ Johnstone, p. 215

³³¹ Johnstone, p. 216

³³² Joe Mccloughlin, interview with Stephen Johnstone, p. 216

³³³ Johnstone, p. 221

³³⁴ Black Country Touring, *reSonAte Afterword*, (Oldbury: BCT, 2008), p. 2

³³⁵ Bobby Tiwana, talking on *reSonAte Afterword* website at <http://www.bctouring.co.uk/resonate/>, accessed January 2017

³³⁶ Black Country Touring, p. 3

The finished performance was very popular, selling out each showing and having to make extra space on the final night because of demand, and had a transformative effect on the professional performers, local participants and general audience. As one participant described the effect of their experience, 'now I am inspired to find new challenges in theatre and acting'.³³⁷ Getting further into these successes, it is significant to note that 47% of attendees were newcomers to theatre and, though based on South Asian experiences, the breakdown of the demographics of attenders are varied in a way that indicates that the performance had a strong wider appeal. It certainly resonated with members of the Arts Council's priority groups, the Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani cohorts each made up 15.1%, 36.3% and 21% of the audience, respectively. But there was still significant interest and attendance from other groups in the locality. White audiences made up 43% of all attendees, a figure that becomes increasingly impressive when it is recognised that only 12% of that demographic participated in the creation of the performance and so were attracted by other, indirect means.

Speaking on the success of the show (and the aims of Black Country Touring more generally), Johnstone suggested that its effect on people was that they 'feel like they've been given a voice and that you are an honest broker in the whole thing, they have a different relationship with the arts after because they see it as about them and not divorced' from their lives.³³⁸ This comment speaks directly to anxieties voiced by the public across the range of secondary research analysed above. However, though offering a powerful counter to those anxieties, Johnstone was wary of testifying to the permanence of the outcome of *Apna Ghar* 'I think one of the weird things about Arts Council approach and the government's approach is they sort of believe once.... It's like catching fish.... They think once you've caught them, you can whack them in a net and they'll never go away again'.³³⁹ More accurately, he suggests, 'it's a permeant process for us, I think, of engagement'.³⁴⁰ From this perspective *Apna Ghar* represents success in an ongoing process and, whilst it should not be held up as a fixed example for all to follow, its processual methods do provide a blueprint for some ways of working that could have a positive impact on public engagement for other theatre companies and arts makers.

The whole performance making process, from conception to presentation, was communally engaged. There was a clear idea of who the audience was (their experience and expectations) and what the performance was intended to show them. As part of that engagement, the work was made relevant to the audience by active public participation in content generation, with local people provided with relevant skills training and then given a vital role in the production process; the

³³⁷ Community Participant, p. 2

³³⁸ Johnstone, p. 218

³³⁹ Johnstone, p. 218

³⁴⁰ Johnstone, p. 218

collection of personal stories through interview. This material was then developed with more public participants – including many children – in rehearsals guided by professional artists which drew on cultural forms that these participants were confident in or, at least, aware of. This combination of content generation and delivery offers the charm of responsibility in a way that enables the public to take ownership of artistic practice and demystify it, effectively countering two major public concerns through empowerment.

The finished performance was staged in a disused Victorian school that was made fit for purpose. The selection of this venue effectively made the performance a part of an individual's domestic life. This could be because the building was literally close to their homes, removing barriers of distance. It could be because its disuse prior to performance meant that it was without the same cultural baggage as a theatre or a concert hall, meaning that an individual needn't worry about appropriate behaviour, attire or performance protocol and, instead, can behave in their regular, fashion. In any case, the selection of this venue challenged a number of powerful material and psychological barriers to engagement and provided a safe space in which the local population felt they could take a chance on arts work.

Finally, the performance was publicised over a range of media; radio, website and newspapers. These advertisements addressed members of those communities that were most immediately connected to the performance content (live studio interviews on BBC WM: Midlands Masala) and those who might be more interested generally (articles in local papers such as *Express & Star*). They did so through channels that appealed to the public for non-art reasons and may often operate in the background of daily life, having a quiet but persistent effect. By advertising in this way, Black Country Touring again brought their performance practice into the daily life of the public, utilising modes of communication that had wider reach than immediate arts advertising (specific websites, limited poster campaigns) and delivering an effective counter to the public complaint that a barrier to the arts is not knowing where to look for them. In doing so, they provide yet another strong example of the range of process that can be utilised to develop public engagement.

To be clear, not all funded organisations could follow this pattern exactly. Building-based companies could not regularly adapt vacant sites, flagship companies might not be keen to welcome amateurs on to their stages and smaller organisations might not have the connections or funds for far-reaching media campaigns. However, all funded companies could adapt elements of this process to their benefit. Public engagement in the rehearsal process (even as small as talking to artists), the incorporation of cultural forms that the audience are comfortable with (in this case, dance), advertising in new and varied ways and collaboration with partners outside "the arts" sector (in this case, schools) all provide areas for the development of fruitful public engagement work.

It is in this way that *Apna Ghar* provides a strong example of how a more processual access policy can increase levels of public engagement with Arts Council-backed organisations over a particular formal push or a specific demographic focus. Moreover, its appeal to newcomers and the reflections of leading Black Country Touring staff also provides a revealing insight on the challenge of access that can help reorient thinking on the shortcomings of the period under consideration and enable a beneficial perspectival shift for the future. Specifically, efforts towards public engagement should be recognised as a *permanent process*, not something limited by arbitrarily defined PSA targets. This means that the challenge is never met, there will always be new barriers to overcome and new people to bring in. From such a perspective, the outlined processual approach to access and the omnivorous turn that it fuels can be seen not as an evolved attempt to achieve certain percentage point gains but, rather, as an ongoing (and more effective) response to identified public concerns which should be routinely re-investigated and updated. The value of this perspectival shift is potentially myriad. It might lead to not only a drop in levels of self-exclusion but the weakening of the concept of self-exclusion itself as the barriers between art and life, the remit of the Arts Council and areas of public interest overlap, to create a more relevant and responsive public-cultural sector that can fairly boast of its ability to bring great art to everyone and ‘democracy to culture’.³⁴¹

Conclusion

Beginning with an outline of New Labour’s cultural policy approaches over their first decade in government, this chapter went on to examine the effect of those policies on the Arts Council through the analysis of secondary research work. It found that despite certain successes, the Arts Council under New Labour failed to meet a number of key access targets. Moreover, this analysis unearthed many other issues that further complicated the mission to increase public access; an art/“the arts” distinction, the sizeable preference for participation in local spaces, the wide scale dis- and even anti-engagement with Arts Council supported forms and a pervasive sense of uncertainty around what the Arts Council is. This chapter went on to utilise a reflexive combination of recent cultural sociology and suggested that these findings indicate that the Arts Council and the public can be understood as paucivorous in their tastes and practices, with both operating in accordance with different value structures; the official and the agreeable. This distinction, rather than identifying two different positions in one cultural capital economy (as in Bourdieu’s homology argument) indicates the operation of different cultural economies within the sector. This separation helps us understand the fundamental struggles of the access policy in this period as it indicates that (despite sustained efforts and good intentions) there was little possibility for long-term improvements because at a

³⁴¹ Smith, *Creative Britain*, p. 2

basic level there was not an effective process for the crossover of cultural capital. To put it bluntly, the Arts Council did not acknowledge a lot of what the public did whilst the public dismiss a lot of what the Arts Council offered.

In response, this chapter suggested that the better realisation of the access agenda would be a more omnivorous turn through which the value structures of the Arts Council and the public could be brought together in a way that allows for fruitful overlap and exchange. To do this, the chapter outlined a shift in policy approach that moved efforts away from focusing on particular groups via limited forms and instead opted for formal, spatial, modal and communicative changes that would address problems that affected all people. These shifts were defined as the development of a processual access policy. The efficacy for such a move and the confidence in its call was founded on analysis of existing secondary research, interviews with a number of venue programmers with experience of audience engagement and the deployment of a relevant case study which offers an effective prototype for future practice. The call was additionally bolstered by the parallel consideration of its theoretical, political and economic challenges. By working in this way, this chapter has provided a thorough reading of issues and challenges faced by the access policy in the recent past, characterised them in a new and critically rigorous way and, ultimately, offered a blueprint for change that contains both practical measures and a theoretically reasoned call for a perspectival shift on how the issue of access is understood from the position of policy formulation. The ultimate effect of this, more than simply unpacking the failures New Labour, is to offer a plan for change in the future that can be used to deliver significant results and higher standards of public service.

The Complexity of Excellence: Supporting Excellence, Kantian Aesthetics and the Challenges of the Policy Process

Introduction

Following its foundation in 1946, the Arts Council of Great Britain sought to build on the successes of its war-time precursor, The Committee for the Encouragement of Music and Arts, but also distance itself from that body in some significant ways. The first Chair, John Maynard Keynes, was keen that the new organisation should not be as concerned with the amateur, propagandistic or morale needs of the nation as its predecessor. Instead, as the leading cultural body, the Arts Council of Great Britain should focus on and support the leading examples of cultural practice. This meant the work carried out by professionals in what have been conventionally dubbed the high-art forms; opera, ballet, theatre. To this end, the foundational charter declared that the Arts Council of Great Britain was interested in 'developing a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively'.³⁴² This commitment to quality has persisted to this day, though the way in which it has been articulated has altered slightly, with the culturally loaded term *fine* being dropped from the renewed charter of 1967 and the devolutionary charter for the Arts Council of England in 1994.

After years of stagnating support levels and rudderless leadership under the changing roster of ministers at the Department of National Heritage, the election of New Labour in 1997 generated excitement amongst the arts community that the pursuit of aesthetic excellence might be re-energised. The prospect of increased funding and the moving of arts into the core script of government seemed to position the development of quality work centrally in New Labour's cultural agenda. Writing in *Creative Britain*, the newly appointed Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith, suggested that government support would be 'used to underpin the best and the most innovative, and the things that would not otherwise find a voice'.³⁴³

However, despite this professed interest from the outset, the development of excellent cultural practice under New Labour was not a smooth or uncontested process. The application of myriad, contractual Public Service Agreements (PSA), the encouragement of cross-departmental relationships and the use of direct government funding for specific arts initiatives (New Audiences, for instance) all meant that the arts supported by the state faced increasing demands to contribute to a range of social agendas: education, crime reduction, social integration. An effect of this was that many in the arts sector felt that the cultural policy pursued by New Labour and administered by the Arts Council took too strong an interest in the instrumental applications of the arts at the cost of

³⁴² Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), p. 401

³⁴³ Chris Smith, *Creative Britain*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 2

supporting their intrinsic values, including aesthetic excellence. Speaking to researchers for *The Arts Debate*, a manager of a regularly funded dance company, opined

‘I think we are missing something in the UK in terms of the arts at the moment.... The area that I work in is so linked with hard outcomes and improving people’s lives, social work. That benefits people and I think it is really important and incredibly valuable, but I think there is a value in allowing artists to develop and move the art form on, and I think we will see a knock-on effect if that isn’t supported’.³⁴⁴

By 2003, frustration with this trajectory had reached national prominence. Writing in *The Observer* in a piece entitled “To Hell with Targets”, Nicholas Hytner celebrated the interest in culture shown by the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) under New Labour and applauded their willingness to make significant cash contributions to the arts, but he lamented that this increased cashflow had led to the creation of a pressurised system that prioritised the extent and type of public outreach that arts organisations were doing, ahead of assessing the quality the work that they produced. Speaking of his own theatre, he quipped ‘until recently, the National Theatre’s audience was getting worse reviews than some of its shows. Then somebody noticed some kids in the house with studs through their noses, and the reviews looked up’.³⁴⁵ Hytner is careful to stress in his article that the arts can have a variety of social and educational benefits but that there can be no way of guaranteeing them through the application of quantifiable measures and targets. He suggests that such stark, output measures have the potential to limit creativity at the point of production and create a pressured, forced relationship between “the arts” and “the people”, at the point of reception. This means that the generation of a natural, loving connection between artists and audience, necessary to a sustainable and ongoing relationship, is less likely to develop. Moreover, in pursuit of such quantifiable objectives, Hytner is concerned that the more challenging questions of quality have been forgotten: ‘it doesn’t seem to matter whether what we do is any good or not’.³⁴⁶

The frustration articulated by Hytner was emblematic of a growing questioning of the value structures that underpinned arts funding in the millennial period. Following the publication of Hytner’s article, Demos held the *Valuing Culture* conference at The National Theatre in June 2003. This conference gave arts practitioners, cultural managers, academics and government ministers the opportunity to discuss the current processes of evaluating culture, identify the flaws of this

³⁴⁴ Cragg Ross Dawson Qualitative Research, *The Arts Debate: Research among stakeholders, umbrella groups and members of the arts community*, (London: Cragg Ross Dawson, 2007), p. 107

³⁴⁵ Nicholas Hytner, “To Hell with Targets” in *The Observer*, 12th January 2003, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/jan/12/featuresreview.review>, accessed August 2016.

³⁴⁶ Hytner, “To Hell with Targets” in *The Observer*, 12th January 2003

approach and begin to plot alternatives. This conference sparked an ongoing conversation that generated a number of significant research documents and policy reflections, including: Tessa Jowell's *Government and the Value of Culture* (2004), John Holden's *Capturing Cultural Value: How culture has become a tool of government policy* (2004) and Jamie Cowling's *For Art's Sake? Society and the arts in the 21st century* (2004). These texts explored different ways of valuing culture and some reasons for funding it that moved beyond the targeted measurement of cultural impact on broader social agendas.

However, the impact of this developing conversation on cultural policy in practice is hard to gauge. To provide one example, for all her enthusiasm for change, Jowell was still bound by the instrumental policy commitments and funding structures that framed her role as Secretary of State for culture. Remembering the letters that he would receive from Jowell, in his position as Arts Council Chair, Christopher Frayling comments

'I have noticed these letters are becoming more prescriptive – and much more detailed. In 2000 the settlement letter from the then Secretary of State, Chris Smith, was three pages long. In 2004, Tessa Jowell wrote me seven pages, more than twice the length of the 2000 letter, with much ring-fencing of sections of the Arts Council's budget for specified purposes'.³⁴⁷

It was not until the departure of Tony Blair in 2007 and the ministerial reshuffle under the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, that the incoming Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, James Purnell, engaged with this conversation about value with vigour. Calling for an end to 'targetolatory', he commissioned Sir Brian McMaster to review current Arts Council practices and outline a way to recentre more intrinsic values in the organisation's policy agenda.³⁴⁸ Given McMaster's pedigree as a former Director of the Edinburgh International Festival, Managing Director of Welsh National Opera, Director of Planning at English National Opera and as a staffer in the International Classical Division of EMI Records, expectations for his reading of the Arts Council and the outline of a more aesthetically interested approach were high.³⁴⁹ The review he offered in January 2008, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*, was warmly welcomed by those in high positions of cultural governance and support. Purnell commended it to all cultural bodies, whilst Frayling declared McMaster's work a 'very welcome intervention' in the aesthetic discussions occurring in Council halls.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ Sir Christopher Frayling, *'The Only Trustworthy Book...' Art and Public Value*, (London: Arts Council England, 2005), p. 17

³⁴⁸ Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*, (London: Verso, 2014), p. 143

³⁴⁹ For a short biography and interview with Sir Brian McMaster, following his retirement from Edinburgh, see "The Quiet Showman" in *The Guardian*, Saturday 5th August 2006, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/05/edinburgh2006.edinburghfestival>, accessed August 2016

³⁵⁰ Christopher Frayling in Arts Council England, *Annual Review 08*, (London: ACE, 2008), p. 3

Despite this warm embrace, the impact of McMaster work on the practice of the Arts Council was limited. In *Great Art for Everyone*, the Arts Council policy plan that most immediately followed the publication of *Supporting Excellence*, the only significant carryover was the re-introduction of peer reviews. 'An important part of our work will be to develop a system where arts organisations honestly assess their own success and conduct peer reviews. We will work closely with the organisations that we fund to develop ways of doing this'.³⁵¹

The reasons for this limited impact are diverse, spanning many internal contradictions and external challenges. This chapter will explore these reasons in detail. It does so because, through them, this document provides a window on an interesting historical moment in which the re-centring of aesthetic considerations in the cultural policy agenda struggled to manifest despite the increasingly articulated need for change. It thus offers a means of reflecting on the challenges of articulating and delivering an aesthetic policy and offers insight into the complexity of the relationship between the New Labour government, the Arts Council and excellence in the arts by the close of the ostensible 'Golden Age'. Like John Street, 'I am not pretending that they [McMaster's ideas] represent a definitive statement of DCMS policy. However, I am taking them as indicative of general thinking within the department and the government' and its Non-Departmental Public Bodies at this point in time.³⁵² Accordingly, the use of *Supporting Excellence* as a case study is useful as it provides an effective way of grounding a wider consideration of the aesthetic question in the period.

This chapter will argue that despite his professed intention to articulate an argument that pushes the intrinsic value of the arts to the fore of policy and evaluation, McMaster's work in *Supporting Excellence* presents several complicated and not fully compatible strands of thinking on artistic quality. Explicitly, it will demonstrate that McMaster's claim to re-centre art's intrinsic value in cultural policy formulations includes and is framed by a range of socially instrumental considerations that he fails to acknowledge. In doing so, he creates a paradoxical blind spot that undermines his position and the strength of the claims he makes from it, to the extent that certain critics have suggested that *Supporting Excellence* is 'nothing more than a well-researched opinion piece'.³⁵³ Though highlighting the extent of this failing, the analysis of this chapter is not primarily concerned with savaging the author or his work. Alternatively, it engages with the limitations of the document to open a wider conversation about the relationship between aesthetic quality and the policy process.

³⁵¹ Arts Council England, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework for the Arts, 2008-2011 (Word Document)*, (London: Arts Council England, 2008), p. 3

³⁵² John Street, "The popular, the diverse and the excellent: political values and UK Cultural Policy" in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2011, p. 384

³⁵³ Susannah Eckersley, "Policy Review: Supporting excellence in the arts: from measurement to judgement" in *Cultural Trends*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2008, p. 184

Using this initial scrutiny of McMaster as a base, this chapter will go on to consider the wider challenge of pursuing a cultural policy that prioritises aesthetic quality and the intrinsic value of the arts, ideas with rich philosophical foundations and histories, in a practical political context. This expanded discussion will bring into relief the fact that philosophy and policy do not easily go together in this way and offer up a characterisation of the aesthetic aspect of cultural policy that enables a shifted understanding of the position of “excellence” within any policy agenda to develop. Specifically, this part of the chapter will argue that rather than be considered on a spectrum that spans from the instrumental to the intrinsic, as the issue has often been characterised in the UK context under consideration here, a more effective way of describing the aesthetic aspect of a cultural policy is as one *of and for* ‘conditioned beauty’.³⁵⁴

This term is taken from Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* and will be unpacked in more detail below but, in short, it is used to suggest that there are inevitably real-world, political pressures on *any* cultural policy. Therefore, the pursuit of a “pure” aesthetic cultural policy primarily guided by interest in the intrinsic value of art is untenable as, to some degree, all cultural policies will have an instrumental aspect. Recognising this, the best way to consider this aspect of cultural policy is not to develop a binary understanding that pitches “excellence” from one pole to the other, as either *ignored by* or *central to* the policy process, but to recognise that, within the framework of instrumental policy interests, there is still a range of ways in which excellent work can be produced, identified and assessed. To demonstrate this idea, and to show the utility of moving away from an instrumental/intrinsic binary and towards a conditional vocabulary, this chapter will present extracts from interviews in the creation of a case study in its final stages. This work will showcase that there can be ‘multiple models of successful, thriving organisations’ that offer a range of excellent experiences regardless of the different spaces made available by the funding frameworks in which they operate, the differing relations each organisation has with their audiences and the shifting artistic interests and desires of the creative staff.³⁵⁵

This chapter will thus offer a reflection on the trajectory of aesthetic thought in the cultural policy approach of the New Labour government that brings us to the close of this thesis’ period of interest, it will open a wider discussion of the policy formulation process and offer a new and theoretically rigorous characterisation of that process, and it will cement this theoretical work with practical examples developed through interviews and case studies. In doing this, the final chapter of this thesis will offer a consideration of the Arts Council’s approach to artistic excellence that, like the

³⁵⁴ Immanuel Kant, trans. James Creed Meredith, rev. ed. and intro. Nicholas Walker, *Critique of Judgement*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 60.

³⁵⁵ Andrew Curry and David Gunn, *Thriving arts organisations for the 21st century: Final report for Arts Council England*, (London: ACE, 2005), p. 1

foregoing discussions of economic rationales and access policies, provides new readings of policy and its effects and offers provocations for further testing.

Before getting into the analysis of McMaster and the wider conversation regarding the relationship between aesthetic thought and the policy process, it is necessary to outline the context of this area in more detail. This outline will consist of a three-tiered literature review that, in the first instance, introduces Arts Council policy towards excellence in the millennial period, plotting the shifting position of aesthetic quality within the wider organisational agenda and positioning that within the broader debate over instrumental and intrinsic values described briefly above. In the second instance, it will introduce the materials that have informed my thinking on the nature of policy formulation more widely and draw out the patterns and intentions behind policy development that can complicate the pursuit of excellence. Lastly, this literature review will introduce the theoretical materials that underpin the “conditional” characterisation that this chapter ultimately offers. Beginning with a sketch of the development of aesthetic thought and a recognition of its breadth as a philosophical tradition, the final phase of the literature review will unpack reasoning for the selection of Immanuel Kant, outline the elements of his theory that will be used here and then detail some critical responses to elements of his thought that have most directly shaped his application here. This literature review will thus provide a thorough and theoretically rigorous foundation upon which to build the reading of McMaster’s *Supporting Excellence in the Arts* and the expanded discussion of policy formulation that it prompts.

Literature Review: Policy Context

New Labour inherited a publicly-supported theatre sector approaching financial crisis, with the Arts Council suggesting that parts of the ecology were nearing a state of terminal decline. This crisis had a notably detrimental effect on the quality of work produced, with *The National Policy for the Theatre in England* (from July 2000) emphasising that ‘large parts of our theatre have been caught in a downward spiral with less exceptional work being produced’.³⁵⁶ This combination of looming financial insolvency and the dearth of quality work meant that ‘in many parts of the country theatre has failed to engage with a broad audience’.³⁵⁷ This mixture of dropping quality, financial uncertainty and shrinking public appeal meant that by 2000 publicly funded theatre in England was in a sorry state.

However, by this point, New Labour had fulfilled their election commitment to hold to Conservative spending figures for two years and had begun a process of re-financing the arts amidst

³⁵⁶ “Appendix 1: The national policy for theatre in England (July 2000)” in Andy Martin and Helen Bartlett, *Implementing the national policy for theatre in England: Case Studies 1*, (London: MORI/ACE, 2004), p. 40

³⁵⁷ Arts Council England, “Appendix 1: The national policy for theatre in England (July 2000)”, p. 40

a larger programme of increasing public expenditure. The Arts Council grant-in-aid began to rise sharply, from £189.9 million in 1998/99 to £228.2 million in 1999/00. Parallel to this, the theatre sector received a £25 million cash injection as part of a post-Boyden Report settlement. This additional cash gave ‘greater confidence in those [regional] producing theatres’, enabling them to write-off cumulative deficits.³⁵⁸ This upsurge effectively provided theatres with the financial security to create longer-term plans, it opened up the space for more innovative work and gave theatre makers the resources to model new relationships with new audiences. Consequently, though formulated in a context of crisis, *The National Policy for Theatre* from 2000 draws on this atmosphere of rejuvenation and outlines a proactive approach to overcome sectoral challenges.

The Arts Council vowed to ‘make bold decisions and be prepared to prioritise, committing or withdrawing funds in response to the levels of ambitions and fresh thinking and the quality of artistic work’.³⁵⁹ To this end, it outlined eight priorities, with the expectation that all funded theatres deliver on the first two and that the remaining six should inform the practice of all subsidised theatres or companies in some way. The two inarguable priorities are the production of ‘a better range of high quality work’ and that the state supported sector should attract more people.³⁶⁰ These demands mirror the organisation’s two chartered objectives and, in their ordering, showcase that as of 2000 a concern for quality work was the number one organisational priority. This primary interest was, in turn, supported by three of the remaining six priorities, each of which showcasing a broader commitment to the development of high quality work. Priority three encouraged arts organisations to develop new ways of working, priority six outlined an organisational commitment to nurture the artists and creative managers of the future, and priority seven emphasised the desire to burnish the English theatre’s reputation on the international stage. Thus, whilst it might be suggested that the attraction of more people (priority two), a commitment to education (priority four), a push for diversity and inclusion (priority five) and the development of regional distinctiveness (priority eight) indicates a prominent instrumental bent in Arts Council thought, I suggest that the matching number of more aesthetic concerns shows that this instrumental interest was not dominant at this point in time.

In 2003, Arts Council England articulated its *Ambitions for the Arts 2003-2006* and outlined a supporting *Corporate Plan*. On first reading, these documents appear to streamline the expectations placed on supported arts organisations. The eight priorities of the 2000 plan have been replaced by six overall aims in 2003. Of these, three can be considered as engaging with aesthetic concerns. Again, the number one aim is an explicit call to support the artist in the production of high quality

³⁵⁸ Interview with David Micklem, see Appendix, p. 235

³⁵⁹ Arts Council England, “Appendix 1: The national policy for theatre in England (July 2000)”, p. 42

³⁶⁰ Arts Council England, “Appendix 1: The national policy for theatre in England (July 2000)”, p. 43

work as these individuals are the 'life source' of the entire cultural ecology.³⁶¹ The second aim is to enable arts organisations to thrive rather than survive. This intention has certain practical, particularly economic and administrative, undertones but it is configured as a catalyst for the development of a stable cultural ecology that can foster the production of the best possible work. Finally, the Arts Council expresses a commitment to 'delivering our values', which include a belief in creativity and quality, as the sixth aim.³⁶² Thus, similar to *The National Policy for Theatre* from 2000, the Arts Council appears to be balancing its agenda, with three aims pursuing notably aesthetic, intrinsic interests whilst the other three are pursuing more instrumental concerns (diversity, young people and economic growth).

Beneath this balanced outline, though, the *Corporate Plan* of 2003-06, and the organisational ambitions that it supports, presents a more complicated picture that suggests the balance of organisational interest was tipping. The *Corporate Plan* makes clear, 'under each of these overall aims we show some specific aims and characteristics of achievement'.³⁶³ Some of these desired achievements include the tackling of racial discrimination, the encouragement of disability equality, the pursuit of social inclusion, the effective delivery of Creative Partnerships with schools, the stimulation of the arts economy and the strengthening of the organisational support structure. Such goals are not inherently problematic but they indicate that there had been a more prominent articulation of the instrumental application of the arts by 2003, and whilst Arts Council England attempted to make clear in *Ambitions for the Arts* that 'we will not ask them [arts organisations] to take on any agendas that are not consistent with their fundamental purpose', it is evident that there was a disparity between the sincerity of this claim and the practical demands of organisational policy.³⁶⁴ Indeed, the publication of Hytner's protest in a national newspaper and the development of a range of research documents that offered alternative valuation approaches suggests that the impact of these instrumental policy interests on artistic practice was far greater than the Arts Council suggested.

In 2006, the Arts Council outlined a new agenda for the arts that would guide its works until 2008. Like the *Ambitions* of 2003, this agenda had six priorities: 'taking part in the arts, children and young people, the creative economy, vibrant communities, internationalism [and] celebrating diversity'.³⁶⁵ This new articulation of priorities is interesting because whilst it maintains the number of organisational aims, it narrows the range of organisational concerns. The six aims of the Arts Council between 2003 and 2006 broadly reveal an interest in contributing to areas of access,

³⁶¹ Arts Council England, *Ambitions for the arts 2003-2006*, (London: ACE, 2003), p. 4

³⁶² Arts Council, England, *Corporate Plan 2003-2006*, (London: Arts Council England, 2003), p. 7

³⁶³ Arts Council England, *Corporate Plan*, p. 3

³⁶⁴ Arts Council England, *Ambitions for the Arts*, p. 5

³⁶⁵ Arts Council England, *Our agenda for the arts 2006-08*, (London: ACE, 2006), p. 1

aesthetics, economics, education and communal relations. Between 2006 and 2008, the six priorities of the organisation suggest an interest in enhancing access, economics, education and communal relations. This smaller range of overall interests (five to four) combined with a stable list of priorities (six) renders certain concerns implicit, whilst pushing others into a more prominent position. Pointedly, the desire to nurture higher standards of aesthetic excellence is no longer explicitly stated as an organisational priority in the agenda for 2006-08. Conversely, the interest in how the arts might foster better relations between people permeates three specific aims; vibrant communities, internationalism and celebrating diversity.

This is not to suggest that the Arts Council and its staff in the theatre department had no concern for quality. For instance, the *Theatre Policy* published alongside the agenda for 2006-08 suggests that the Arts Council wanted ‘to encourage a better range of high quality’ work as part of its vision for the sector.³⁶⁶ Equally, members of staff within theatre department claim that the relationship between instrumental, access oriented policies and more intrinsic concerns for excellence was explored ‘in every project, and every discussion we had about projects at the Arts Council’.³⁶⁷ It is to make clear, however, that these more intrinsic concerns were becoming increasingly implicit. Thus, as much as aesthetic interests may have under writ organisational priorities, they were not being expressed as explicit concerns on the organisational agenda. This new, unacknowledged position suggests that the recognition of the importance of aesthetic quality had shifted. To the point that, even though a concern for excellence was still a part of internal conversations and informed the funding rationale, the ‘criteria around quality were less stringently deployed in areas’ of social interest so as not to impede the attainment of more prominent instrumental objectives.³⁶⁸ Acknowledging this, whilst it is inaccurate and unfair to say that aesthetic considerations had disappeared from organisational thinking by 2008, it is just to suggest that aesthetic quality had been re-positioned as a secondary or supportive factor in a policy approach that was increasingly socially engaged.

Pausing here to consider the trajectory of policy prior to the publication of McMaster’s review, it is evident that between 2000 and 2008 Arts Council’s policy concerns became increasingly instrumental in character but that the intrinsic interests of the organisation were not entirely overwhelmed, even if they were subverted. The value of recognising this shifting relationship is that it provides the first step in getting out of the intellectual tramlines of the “intrinsic vs. instrumental” debate that lead to unhelpful readings of the period’s overarching character in an either/or fashion. Specifically, with regards to this chapter, this policy review makes clear that polarised

³⁶⁶ Arts Council England, *Theatre Policy*, (London: ACE, 2006), p. 7

³⁶⁷ Interview with Micklem, p. 231

³⁶⁸ Interview with Micklem, p. 233

understandings of the position of quality in organisational thinking, as either ignored by it or central to it, cannot provide suitable explanations of this issue. Something else is required. This point will be strengthened through the critical reading of McMaster's internal and external challenges that follows but is here flagged up to showcase the limitations of an instrumental/intrinsic binary in context.

Attempts to get out this binary and articulate a more mixed understanding of cultural value that acknowledged the social and economic applications of the arts but also recognised that their intrinsic qualities were a significant part of their worth were ongoing throughout this period. Hytner's article in *The Observer* is the most striking popular example of this work but he was not alone in his reflexive call for change. Jowell deviated from established DCMS policy positions in her 2004 essay *Government and the Value of Culture*. In this text, Jowell suggested that those in political and public culture had avoided the problem of investigating and articulating the value of 'what culture actually does in and of itself', favouring more quantifiable, easily demonstrated findings that certainly show the social impact of the arts but fail to articulate their inherent value.³⁶⁹ This avoidance has led to stagnation in the governance of the sector, with the entrenchment of the unhelpful access vs. excellence debate, and the consequent limiting of language. This shrunken vocabulary is particularly problematic as it has limited the means through which those passionate about the arts might make a holistic case about their value to a healthy society.

Responding to this problem, Jowell suggests that 'there is another story to tell on culture' and positions herself – as a key figure in the cultural sector – in the vanguard of this new enunciation.³⁷⁰ To this end, she offers five questions, asking after the importance of defining and talking about intrinsic value, wondering if there is a need for the political establishment to step back from the arts, considering how to best capture value in a way that moves beyond targets and measures, enquiring if longer-term funding models might be a more effective means of support and, finally, asking how might all of these questions be answered? She is not forthcoming with responses but at the close of her essay she invites the cultural sector to engage with these provocations in a way that prompts debate and helps develop the consideration of value and the policies founded upon it.

Holden's *Capturing Cultural Value* (2004) is a response to Jowell's questions that proposes a 'wholesale reshaping of the way in which public funding of culture is undertaken'.³⁷¹ This reshaping should be founded on a turn to a "Cultural Value" system of assessment and funding distribution.³⁷² This system would still acknowledge the quantifiable economic and social impacts of the arts but it

³⁶⁹ Tessa Jowell, *Government and the Value of Culture*, (London: DCMS, 2004), p.8

³⁷⁰ Jowell, p. 8

³⁷¹ John Holden, *Capturing Cultural Value: How culture has become a tool of government policy*, (London: Demos, 2004), p. 9

³⁷² This is not to be confused with the system outlined by Throsby in the foregoing chapter on economics (p. 46), although there are some overlaps between the two ideas.

would place more emphasis on the ‘affective elements of cultural experience’, acknowledging that the hard to quantify subjective experiences of audience members are of merit.³⁷³ This more balanced assessment structure would be framed by a broader understanding of public value that adopted ‘public goods such as equity, fairness, enhancing trust in the public realm, health and prosperity, as long-term objectives’ but did not impose them as time-limited targets.³⁷⁴ The intended effect of this would be that state supported artists would be able to clearly identify the expectations around the work they create using public money but these expectations would not stifle or subvert the creative process. Holden suggests that this mixture of a clearly informed but (relatively) free artistic base would lead, Holden suggests, to the development of a strong culture, ‘confident in its own worth’, that served the needs of cultural policy makers but also delivered work that was loved (and so legitimised) by a public that gleaned immense subjective satisfaction from it.³⁷⁵ Published at a time of increasing frustration with Art Council England’s policy approach, Holden’s proposals represent a radical new cultural strategy in which ‘funders would respond to the missions and visions of cultural organisations rather than setting their agendas’.³⁷⁶ This shift would effectively inverse the existing power structures, granting directive control of the cultural agenda to arts organisations, thereby creating a bottom-up model, primarily motivated by intrinsic concerns.

However, the impact of this radicalism in practice is questionable. Published in December 2004, *Capturing Cultural Value* entered a debate in which government ministers and leading Arts Council figures were also presenting ideas. In the latter case, the Institute for Public Policy Research offered *For Arts Sake? Society and the Arts in the 21st Century* in April 2004. This publication considered the relationship between the arts and wider social goals, ranging over the contributions that the former makes to education, mental healthcare and crime reduction. It is framed by an opening chapter penned by then Arts Council Chief Executive, Peter Hewitt. In a similar vein to Jowell and Holden’s work, Hewitt calls for an investigation into the intrinsic qualities of the arts and stresses the need for a new recognition of such value. Hewitt, however, is less concerned with radical change and inversions of power structures and, rather, sees the better identification of arts’ inherent power as a means of bolstering the current social and economic arguments for funding. This differentiation from the emotive essay of Jowell (that frames the arts as part of a transformative social project) and the radical alternative penned by Holden (that presents a new structure) showcases a more pragmatic relationship with aesthetics and a more comfortable acceptance of the status quo. For Hewitt, the pursuit and identification of high-quality art is about strengthening the case-making process rather than being a means of shifting the argument onto more intrinsic territory. Thus,

³⁷³ Holden, p. 10

³⁷⁴ Holden, p. 10

³⁷⁵ Holden, p. 10

³⁷⁶ Holden, p. 12

whilst he may appear to outline the need for a 'new language of value', it is more accurate to say that his essay showcases his desires to fold new words into a well-established lexicon.³⁷⁷ The persistence of a socio-economic lexicon at the expense of an explicitly aesthetic one, detailed in the foregoing policy outline, suggests that Hewitt's stance, ahead of Jowell and Holden, was of enduring influence.

This more complicated position is emblematic of wider issues that were not so easily resolved. Indeed, whilst it is clear that by 2004 the frustration with instrumental applications and measures for the state supported arts had begun to generate prominent calls for change, it is evident that those calls did not have any immediate effect. As the preceding work has shown, the instrumental concerns of the Arts Council were persistent and, even, increasing until 2008, as was the pressure that Jowell applied through the lengthening letters she penned in accompaniment to the government grant-in-aid. The evident backlash from those in the sector and the developing conversation amongst government ministers, Arts Council leaders and research bodies, prompts us to consider why this application of an instrumental policy approach continued?

An answer to this question is provided in the next part of the literature review that considers some materials that examine the nature of the policy process. This work plays a significant part in the forthcoming critical analysis of the complexities of the McMaster review, specifically, but it also provides a clear explanation of why unpopular instrumental approaches persisted despite growing protest that might be effectively deployed in other contexts. The value of outlining this material is that it will make clear why more aesthetic ideas may sit uneasily in the practical-political framework of cultural policy formulation and implementation. In doing so, it will help cultivate an understanding of the policy process that can be applied to analyses in other contexts.

Literature Review: Policy Formulation

My understanding of how cultural policy was formulated in the UK context of the 1990s and early 2000s, and what its character may be, is founded on several texts. These texts span disciplines that I identify as Cultural History, Cultural Policy Studies and Cultural Policy Mechanics. The publications of Jen Harvie, Liz Tomlin, Robert Hewison, Andrew Sinclair and Richard Witts that are referenced throughout this thesis provide instances of Cultural History work. These texts discuss policy through the examination of examples from real-life and position them within a historical narrative. In effect, cultural policy in this instance refers to the study of a particular policy once it has been implemented: x is what the government and Arts Council did, y is what effect it had and z is a way that we can interpret this. As an example of this kind of historical cultural policy analysis, it is useful

³⁷⁷ Peter Hewitt, "The value of evidence.... and the evidence of value" in Jamie Cowling (ed.), *For Arts Sake? Society and the Arts in the 21st Century*, (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2004), P.21

to look back to the brief discussion of Scottish National Theatre offered in an earlier history chapter of this thesis.³⁷⁸ This discussion of performance, identity and the construction of an inclusive nationalism, itself informed by Harvie's work on 'policy paradigms', considered the impact of the policy on the development of a Scottish National Theatre and positioned it in relation to a devolving UK.³⁷⁹ It highlighted the possible problems of the policy (surges in jingoistic nationalism), its positive impact (the encouragement of an inclusive nationalism) and positioned it in relation to the larger policy context (cultural devolution ahead of governmental devolution).

The value of this kind of Cultural History is that it helps develop understanding of *a* policy (or a series of policies) in context, illuminating the relationships between different bodies, exploring real-world effects and enabling the plotting of trends over time. Literature of this kind has made a significant contribution to the development of this chapter (and wider thesis) and whilst it is important to be wary of factors that can influence the creation of such cultural narratives (authorial sympathy, for instance) it is essential not to ignore the necessity of this form of cultural policy analysis in the development of assured understandings of the field.

Despite its necessity, the study of cultural histories does not provide a sufficient understanding of cultural policy as *a subject* to support the consideration of why the Arts Council and McMaster struggled to incorporate intrinsic values into organisational agendas in the face of open demands to do so. These texts may reveal the details and consequences of a particular policy approach may be but they might not make clear the policy formulation process and the range of historical, political, social, administrative and economic factors that influence it prior to, and at, the point of implementation. In effect, Cultural History provides myriad examples of cultural policy in practice but does not necessarily consider cultural policy as a subject itself and this is its limitation.

Other texts take steps towards solving this problem. These texts are what I identify as Cultural Policy Studies. They often explore the area of influence of cultural policy, outline the debates in the sector and offer reflections on the underlying thinking of cultural bodies. Some of the Cultural Policy Studies that this has contributed to the formulation of thought in this thesis include Francois Matarasso's and Charles Landry's *Balancing Act: twenty-one strategic dilemmas in cultural policy* (2000), Eleonora Belfiore's article "On bullshit in cultural policy practice and research" (2008), Bewes and Gilbert's *Cultural Capitalism: Politics after New Labour* (2000), and a range of Arts Council produced reviews and reflections, including, *What People Want From the Arts* (2008), *Theatre Assessment 2009* (2009), *This is England: how Arts Council England uses its investment to shape a national cultural ecology* (2014).

³⁷⁸ See pp. 18-19

³⁷⁹ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 16

The UK Cultural Sector: Profile and Policy Issues (2001) is a collection edited by Sara Selwood. It provides a strong example of this kind of work and is useful for grounding a conversation about the scope and value of this discipline to this thesis. This text, broken down into four parts and further separated into thirty-four chapters and five appendices, examines key policy issues, funding structures, the wider social context in which the cultural sector operates and the profile of its constituent parts (i.e. the income, expenditure and employment practices of the theatre, film and music industries etc....). It thus provides a 'picture of the sector which is drawn from several different perspectives. It includes data provided by those who provide subsidies, and by organisations which receive them, plus analysis and interpretations from a range of professionals and commentators who work in or around the sector'.³⁸⁰ This scrutiny identifies certain patterns and generates a number of questions. On the topic of DCMS Support for instance, Selwood muses 'given that the DCMS is directly and indirectly responsible for the largest tranches of subsidy to the cultural sector, it seems reasonable to ask: to what extent are its objectives being delivered?'³⁸¹ These questions are designed as triggers for further assessment rather than servicing the development of a larger historical narrative or argument. Indeed, the kind of theoretical abstraction used in the development of overarching arguments seen in the Cultural History texts is not utilised in the same way here. Alternatively, the analysis of Selwood and her contributors is founded on a more practical interest that outlines the material qualities of a situation, the potential implications and effects of this material condition on creative work, and then – finally – offers suggestions for how this area (and the research around it) may be developed in the future.

As an illustrative example, the chapter "Why does government fund the cultural sector" outlines a comprehensive range of reasons for why government expends tax revenue on arts practice. These include a discussion of the market failure argument, the suggestion of governmental commitment to delivering "public goods" and an interest in providing transferrable skills training through arts practice. From here, the chapter details the changing levels of grant-in-aid spending in the UK, plotting average annual expenditure from 1974 to 2004, before going on to offer a tabulated comparison of UK spending levels with other nations. Having established the economic underpinning of this area of cultural policy, the chapter goes on to detail its declared objectives, providing a comprehensive list of the 21 PSA targets developed by the DCMS for its supported bodies in 1998. The chapter then offers a reflexive cross reference of how these PSA targets are informed by the wider reasons for government expenditure on the arts, effectively connecting the specific contemporary targets with the larger ongoing thinking about market failure, public goods and training for modern industries. The chapter closes with a nod to further materials, including

³⁸⁰ Sara Selwood (ed.), *The UK Cultural Sector: Profile and Policy Issues*, (London: Policy Studies Institute, 2001), p. xxxix

³⁸¹ Selwood, p. xlviii

‘resource accounts for DCMS (and other government departments)’, that can aid policy researchers in their exploration of this issue in the future.³⁸²

In this way, like Cultural History, this chapter (and the type of texts it represents) can be described as a critical and informative reflection on government funding and cultural policy, but its conclusions – and so its value – are of a different kind. Explicitly, these texts provide a strong foundational understanding of longstanding issues in the UK cultural policy context and also provide illuminating examples of how these issues inform contemporary approaches. In combination with the broader perspectives, richer theoretical reflections, and more critically explicit interpretations offered by cultural histories, this specific, detailed, practical analysis enables the development of a more complete understanding of the sector. Indeed, by taking cultural policy *as its primary focus*, Cultural Policy Studies provides a means of securely underpinning my understandings of the wider interpretations of Cultural History and enable me to better articulate my own. In taking advantage of this different approach, this thesis has, thus, strengthened its understanding of cultural policy issues in UK context and, in the case of this chapter, become better equipped to recognise and analyse the position of intrinsic thought in the state supported sector in the millennial period.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that Cultural Policy Studies have certain limitations. These limitations are not to be understood as fundamental flaws but, rather, in terms of degrees. The study of policy issues, funding structures, wider context and sectoral profiles are all useful but they can be strengthened by a further push that examines ‘what actually happens on the ground, in the process of implementation’.³⁸³ This more detailed push engages with ‘policy as lived political values’ and explores the political and practical pressures that shape its formulation and delivery.³⁸⁴ It can be characterised as an interest in Policy Mechanics. This terminology does not derive from an established disciplinary school, it is a distinction made by myself due to the focus of authors in given texts but, broadly, the materials and ideas that contribute to this aspect of the literature review come from fields of Cultural Economics and Cultural History.

Writing in *The Economics of Cultural Policy*, David Throsby suggests that ‘there are standard approaches to systematising the policy process in any area of public administration’, including the cultural sector.³⁸⁵ This process moves through six stages. First, a given body identifies objectives that they would like to achieve. Second, the responsibility for the achievement of these objectives is administered to the appropriate part (or parts) of that body. Third, the active parts of the policy body coordinate with each other to ensure the effective delivery of the given policy. Fourth, the agents select the best instruments to deliver the policy objectives. Fifth, the policy is implemented

³⁸² Stephen Creigh-Tyte and Gareth Stiven, “Why Does Government Fund the Cultural Sector” in Selwood, p. 188

³⁸³ Street, p. 383

³⁸⁴ Street, p. 383

³⁸⁵ David Throsby, *The Economics of Cultural Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 32

and, sixth, during and after implementation the administrative bodies begin a process of monitoring and evaluation to better shape future policy developments. The multi-faceted nature of this process leads Throsby to suggest that ‘the areas of government responsibility that are likely to have some involvement with cultural policy’ are numerous.³⁸⁶ He suggests that arts and culture ministries may have a primary influence in their sector but that they could easily be paired with the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Education, the Departments of Urban and Regional Development, the Departments of Environment, and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.³⁸⁷

Connecting these ideas to the Selwood example detailed above provides an effective illustration of this conception of the policy formulation process. First, the government’s desire for the creation of public goods, say the improvement of attainment in primary and secondary education, would be the objective of a given cultural policy. The responsibility for its delivery would fall to the DCMS and, in turn, to the Arts Council. In the context of New Labour, where social inclusion and education were significant governmental priorities, these cultural bodies would be encouraged (even required) to co-ordinate with appropriate departments of state to deliver the objective. Socially engaged art such as applied theatre would be identified as a viable instrument. Appropriate theatre companies would then receive budget increase or be backed by particular initiatives to do work in schools supporting the education of children or to reach out to children at the fringes of the community and attempt to show them the value of learning. The longstanding operation of Creative Partnerships between schools and artists and the work of Cardboard Citizens, a company that works with the homeless and has an ‘innovative performing arts programme for young people aged 16-25 who are not in education’, provide evidence of such implementation measures.³⁸⁸ Following the completion of these initiatives or performances, the Arts Council, along with the relevant governmental bodies, would then assess the impact of this kind of practice and make plans for the improved delivery of policy objectives in the future.

It is important here to acknowledge that this outline presents a simplified version of the policy process and that certain examples might be used to counter the markedly social inflection shown here. Not every supported theatre company may work in such an applied fashion for the explicit delivery of an instrumental goal. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the pervasive influence that this type of socially informed policy objectives had on artistic organisations. So that, even if certain examples can show that arts organisations’ *primary focus* wasn’t the delivery of instrumental objectives, it cannot be denied that increasing government interest rendered such

³⁸⁶ Throsby, p. 28

³⁸⁷ See Throsby pp. 28-29 for an expanded discussion of this list.

³⁸⁸ Cardboard Citizens, *Act Now Young People’s Programme*, available at <https://www.cardboardcitizens.org.uk/act-now-young-peoples-programme>, accessed July 2017

objectives chronic sectoral concerns within the timeframe of this study. This suggestion is supported by the *Baseline Findings* of the research into the implementation of the national policy for theatre in England which states that, as early as 2000, ‘virtually all of the organisations (97%) said that they were focusing on at least one of the six optional priority areas identified in the National Theatre Policy’.³⁸⁹ As noted above, these priority areas included education, diversity and inclusion, and the encouragement of regionally distinctive practices.

In summation, Throsby’s plotting of the policy process provides a way of describing the socio-political influence on arts practice in detail, illuminating the mechanics of instrumentalism. Following the outline of cultural history and cultural policy studies, the value of this work is manifold. Generally, it adds another layer of scrutiny and contributes to an increasingly detailed literary framework that moves from materials that consider *a* policy in practice to a consideration of policy as subject to a study of the workings of that subject. The benefit of this is that the literature review of the policy process offers a clear guide to how policy “works”. The application of Throsby’s thought thus prompts a grander reflection. This reflection provides an answer to the question of why the policy formulation and assessment process struggled to move towards a more intrinsic stance, despite vocal criticism and calls for change that were described above.

To explain, the range of inputs on a given policy process described by Throsby, indicates that the desire to deliver strictly intrinsic values is never likely to dominate a policy formulation process, even for a cultural policy.³⁹⁰ This is not to say that intrinsic values are not appreciated and pursued to the extent that they are incorporated within a cultural policy agenda, but it is to point out that within the wider policy framework, the interest in artistic quality is likely to be a fairly small concern. Throsby’s outline of policy mechanics indicates that however intrinsic the rhetoric of a particular cultural policy might be, the broader formulation process means that even such vociferous examples are ultimately the product of a deeply instrumental process. Indeed, formulated by governments and other official bodies in response to social problems that those bodies have identified and wish to address, all policy is intended to dictate action that has ameliorative real-world effects. Any policy can, therefore, be described as an instrumental device. Admittedly, the effects that any policy may generate, though framed by a particular set of socially contingent expectations and priorities, are not strictly bound to those expectations and priorities. In the case of the arts, a supported organisation could comfortably deliver the instrumental specifics expected by the policy framework whilst also creating work that delivers intrinsic achievements beyond that frame. However, whilst this is the case, it is important to stress that even such broadly successful art works cannot escape

³⁸⁹ Andy Martin and Helen Bartlett, *Implementing the national policy for theatre in England: Baseline Findings*, (London: MORI/ACE, 2003), p. 5

³⁹⁰ The discussions of the Arts Council’s efforts to increase public access and the range of outcomes they accepted as valuable returns outlined in the foregoing chapters provides evidence of this.

the fact that they are the end product of a cultural policy process that is guided by a persistent socio-political equation that is informed by many non-artistic factors: Social Problem + Policy= Social Solution through Action.

In this way, Throsby's work enables the wider reflection that any cultural policy will be subject to some degree of inevitable instrumentalism. This idea of an inevitable, underlying instrumentalism will be explored through a case study of McMaster's *Supporting Excellence*. The forthcoming analysis of the complexity of that document will provide a demonstration of Throsby's ideas in practice and, given its position as the celebrated response to the frustration with instrumental dominance detailed above, open the door to a new characterisation of the aesthetics of cultural policy. This characterisation will present a move away from the binary understanding of instrumental vs. intrinsic policy drivers, which is a flawed conception, and alternatively suggest that conditioned beauty provides the best way of describing the position of aesthetics within the wider cultural policy process. This suggestion will then be strengthened by the deployment of a case study that showcases a theatre company that produces quality work even when framed by certain instrumental conditions. Before going on to do this, though, it is necessary in the final phases of this literature review to outline how the thesis will assess the more intrinsic ideas presented by McMaster's prose.

Literature Review: Aesthetic Philosophy

In the development of this thesis, I have explored a range of texts on art theory and aesthetic philosophy. These materials span from ancient engagements with the question around the arts and their effects, such as Plato's *Republic*, through the birth of aesthetics with Alexander Baumgarten, Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel, and onto modern and post-modern reflections about the constitution of art objects and their perception in experience, including work by Arthur C. Danto, John Dewey and George Dickie.³⁹¹ This span presents a challenge as it provides many ways to scrutinise the aesthetic claims made by McMaster in *Supporting Excellence*.

My selection of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* as the means of providing theoretical rigor for this analysis may at first appear anachronistic and ill fitting, bringing an eighteenth-century philosophical text to bear on a twenty-first century policy review. However, as forthcoming work will demonstrate, the merger of the two is fruitful, with the former providing an effective means of scrutinising the latter. Specifically, elements of Kant's aesthetic philosophy can be used to both problematise the legitimacy of McMaster's intrinsic claims *and* articulate a more accurate

³⁹¹ For a full list of the art theory and aesthetic material consulted, see bibliography

characterisation of the impact that a persistent instrumental interest has on the pursuit of more intrinsic qualities, such as artistic excellence, within the cultural policy process.

To unpack these fruitful possibilities in more detail, I offer the following reasoning for my selection of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* as a thinking tool. To begin, there is a correlation between the primary interests and perceptions of Kant and McMaster's works. In the former case, Kant's philosophy provides a strong early engagement with the questions of aesthetic quality and judgement. As Saville comments, the *Critique of Judgement* is the 'starting point for all serious aesthetic theory after 1790'.³⁹² His is the first significant text to address the issue of beauty and its underlying qualities: 'totality, harmony, clarity, precision, perfection and elegance'.³⁹³ In a similar fashion, McMaster's work is pitched as a call for the freeing of 'artists and cultural organisations from outdated power structures and burdensome targets' that have stifled and subverted their best aesthetic practice, and is further framed as a significant re-centring of explicitly artistic considerations within the policy process.³⁹⁴ These considerations mirror Kant's idea of beauty with all its underlying qualities, centring on excellence as the highest aesthetic achievement and offering outlines of how it is supported by innovation, risk, affect, insight and relevance. This overlap indicates that McMaster recognises excellence as an aesthetic category. In establishing this connection, McMaster's work invites the consideration of how it measures up against one of the most enduring theorisations in the field.

In addition to this broader thematic overlap, Kant's work also offers certain linguistic overlaps with McMaster that open fertile areas for discussion. Notably, both Kant and McMaster are interested in the role of judgement in the process of aesthetic consideration. This shared terminology draws attention to the role of the agent in the moment of assessment and invites consideration of each author's understanding of the relationship between the objective status of the art work and the subjective condition of the audience. This mutual interest provides a provocative starting point for analysis as, given Kant's unflappable suggestion that the aesthetic Judgement is subjective, McMaster's understanding of the relationship will inevitably prompt a telling response about the nature of *his* aesthetics. Finally, Kant provides a range of theoretical terminology that enables the insightful and original reading of McMaster's work and, by extension, the policy process that it is a part of. Specifically, Kant's thinking on conditioned beauty provides a new way of characterising the complexity of McMaster's review.

³⁹² Saville, Anthony, "Beauty: A Neo-Kantian Account" in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 125

³⁹³ Francis X. J. Coleman *The Harmony of Reason: A Study in Kant's Aesthetics*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), p. 22

³⁹⁴ James Purnell in Sir Brian McMaster, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*, (London: DCMS, 2008), p. 4

Given all of this, the application of elements of the *Critique of Judgement* provides an authoritative and theoretically rich means of testing how McMaster's suggestions measure up in relation to the larger claim that his work offers a re-centring of excellence and intrinsic concerns in the cultural policy process. Moreover, it offers a new way of understanding that process. Even so, the pairing of Kant and McMaster may still appear as jarring in places. Though acknowledging this awkwardness, I suggest that it is the product of the fact that this chapter is first articulation of an idea that offers a new step forward in thinking in a particularly entrenched cultural policy debate. Consequently, whilst this chapter may not offer a wholly polished reading, the fundamental pairing and the work produced through it is sound and the presentation of the nature of the relationship between the two can be refined in future research that better covers the joints.

The application of Kant's aesthetics as a critical device is challenging given the density and intricacies of his work. To address this, I will now outline his theory. This outline will detail the fundamental mechanics of Kant's thought and unpack his idea of conditioned beauty, specifically. By providing this general and particular reading of the critical material, the outline will clarify the key ideas that this chapter utilises throughout, thereby freeing the forthcoming analysis to develop a fluid discussion that is not hindered by the need to offer a parallel unpacking of challenging theoretical work. This will be followed by a literature review of critical sources that analyse this philosophy and have helped bolster my understanding of it, generally, and in the case of conditional beauty, shaped my understanding of its utility for application, specifically.

Outlining the Theoretical Framework: Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*

The *Critique of Judgement* (1790) was Kant's third Critique, following the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), respectively. It is concerned with exploring and presenting the workings of feelings and subjective judgement, considered as a mental faculty that is distinct from cognitive understanding or empirical reasoning.³⁹⁵ Across the two parts of the critique, Kant theorises how judgement works in respective relation to the beautiful, the sublime and the teleological. It is the first of these relations that is of interest here. Kant suggests that for any aesthetic judgement of a natural or artistic object to be passed and accepted as beautiful, that judgement must incorporate four moments; the moment of quality, the moment of quantity, the moment of relation of the ends brought under review in such judgement, and the moment of modality of delight in the object.

³⁹⁵ See Walker, Nicholas "Introduction" in *Critique of Judgement* by Immanuel Kant, trans. James Creed Meredith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. xii for more details.

When Kant writes of the moment of quality his foundational proposition is that the 'judgement of taste is aesthetic'.³⁹⁶ This means that the judgement of taste cannot be explained by an overarching cognitive principle. Nor can it be pre-emptively attributed because of the qualities of a given object. Rather, as aesthetic, the determining ground of a judgement of taste '*cannot be other than the subjective*'.³⁹⁷ It must be entirely located in the experience of the individual in the moment of assessment of an object. As a further qualification, Kant asserts that this instance of individual judgement cannot be informed by a range of other factors. A judgement of something as beautiful cannot be bound to notions of the agreeable or the good. The former is directly pleasant, something which '*the senses find pleasing in sensation*' alone, certain sounds, colours or smells, for instance.³⁹⁸

The problem with this, for the judgement of the beautiful, is that direct sensations are physical reactions that are innately connected to an individual's sensual faculties. Agreeable responses are therefore prey to the differences of those faculties across individuals. Simply, what *a* may find '*attractive, charming, delicious, enjoyable*' is not necessarily what *b* may find attractive, charming, delicious or enjoyable.³⁹⁹ In most situations this difference would not matter, as we are all entitled to our likes and dislikes, but in the moment of reflecting on and communicating a judgement of the beautiful such discrepancies cannot stand. An object cannot be beautiful for *a*, but not for *b*.

The problem with the judgement of the good is that it is informed by concepts. A good object is one in which the subject recognises its use and end, that *x* is '*good for something*', and judges it accordingly.⁴⁰⁰ This changes the relationship between the subject and the object, pushing the former into an interested position. This shift challenges the judgement of the beautiful because it renders it contingent, a consequence of some objective application rather the product of an independent subjective response. Wary of such practical applications, Kant stresses that a subject must do all they can to remove the influence of that knowledge from our aesthetic considerations.

Kant summarises the distinction between these three forms of judgement as follows, '*the agreeable is what GRATIFIES us; the beautiful what simply PLEASES us; the good what is ESTEEMED (approved), i.e. that on which we set an objective worth*', and goes on to suggest that what this indicates is that if judgements of the beautiful are to pass muster, then the judging subject must judge in a state of disinterestedness.⁴⁰¹ This means that, in the moment of aesthetic judgement, an individual should be indifferent to the existence of the object under consideration and the ability of that object to perform an esteemed service or gratify personal proclivities. Thus, in the first

³⁹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 35

³⁹⁷ Kant, p. 35

³⁹⁸ Kant, p. 37

³⁹⁹ Kant, p. 37

⁴⁰⁰ Kant, p. 39

⁴⁰¹ Kant, p. 41

moment, '*taste* is the faculty of judging an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest*. The object of such a delight is called *beautiful*'.⁴⁰²

Given this dislocation between self and interest, Kant argues that any individual judgement of the beautiful can be (and, in fact, must be) expanded to apply universally. 'Since the delight is not based on any inclination of the subject (or on any other deliberate interest), but the judging subject feels himself completely *free* in respect of the liking which he accords to the object, he can find as reason for his delight no personal conditions to which his own subjective self might alone be party'.⁴⁰³ This may seem like an improbable, perhaps even impossible claim, that an individual judgement can be ratified by every member of the global population in an affirmative act that crosses countries, cultures and the diverse histories of art and aesthetic thought. Acknowledging this difficulty, Kant offers the following qualification: 'the judgement of taste itself does not *postulate* the agreement of everyone [.....] it only *imputes* this agreement to everyone, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation'.⁴⁰⁴ This means that, whilst the universal claim is a constituent part of beauty, it is not the case that an individual's initial judgement of beauty is an instantaneously or universally valid example of the claim in action. Rather, the individual judgement of beauty acts as a marker of personal reflection ("I believe that this is beautiful") and offers the instance as a test of the universal rule ("do you believe that this is beautiful?") for which it waits in confirmation. In a sense, every judgement of the beautiful is an invite to a universal conference, out of which (and only out of which) the claims of the initial judgement can be ratified or rebuked. Even with this qualification, Kant concedes that the idea of a universal testing ground for beauty is 'weak indeed and scarce sufficient to raise a presumption' about the possibility or character of a universal taste.⁴⁰⁵ Nevertheless, some form of universal consideration is a necessary part of any aesthetic judgement for Kant, asserting that 'the beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally', at the close of the second moment.⁴⁰⁶

In the third moment Kant is interested in how the form of an object relates to the ends of that object and what impact this connection may have in the moment of aesthetic judgement. In his opening proposition, Kant posits that 'an end is the object of a concept so far as this concept is regarded as the cause of the object (the real ground of its possibility)'.⁴⁰⁷ Kant is suggesting that the end of an object, meaning its use or aim, is defined by the extent to which the concept behind that object influenced the development of that object.

⁴⁰² Kant, p. 42

⁴⁰³ Kant, p. 42-43

⁴⁰⁴ Kant, p. 47

⁴⁰⁵ Kant, p. 62

⁴⁰⁶ Kant, p. 51

⁴⁰⁷ Kant, p. 51

It can be said that the end of an electric lawnmower is to cut grass, because the concept that the lawnmower operates in accordance with, and the one that caused it to be built in the first place, was a desire for machinery to cut grass and so save time and manual labour. Kant goes on to characterise such a causal relationship, the close connection between the concept and the object in manifestation, as ‘purposiveness’.⁴⁰⁸ This term collapses the distinctions between concept and object. Using the example of an electric lawnmower once more, it is likely that we all know what a lawnmower does and why it exists. There is no need for us to plot the connections between the concept of the object and the object itself. This information is known almost intuitively, with each aspect so closely connected that it is hard to separate them. Thus, it can be said that the purposiveness of an electric lawnmower is known. Connecting this thought to the preceding discussion of quality and quantity, it is immediately apparent that Kantian aesthetics could not recognise an object with such clearly recognised purpose as beautiful.

However, if an individual is presented with a lawnmower in an art gallery or is asked to look upon something that they had an equally intuitive knowledge of the purpose of and assess it aesthetically, Kant suggests that this would be possible. This is because ‘we are not always obliged to look with the eye of reason into what we observe’.⁴⁰⁹ There are two ways we might avoid this. The first is for an individual to approach an object and assess it disinterestedly. Kant provides the example of a botanist who may well know that a flower is the reproductive part of a plant but will not allow that information to cloud their judgement on whether the flower is beautiful or not as, simply, the former has no bearing on the latter. The second is concerned with the instance in which a subject is presented with an object and, yet, they do not know what that object is. Imagine seeing an electric lawnmower without knowing that it was an electric lawnmower. In such an event, the object in question may have a purposiveness but, for the unknowing viewer, this possibility exists apart from its purpose ‘in so far as [they] do not locate the causes of this form’ in the will of a creator or in some recognisable use.⁴¹⁰ This is what Kant describes as purposiveness without purpose and it is this that allows an individual to move their judgements from the determining ground of the good to the aesthetic, as they are only able to assess an object formally as opposed to conceptually.

The final moment of Kant’s *Analytic of the Beautiful* returns to the question of universality. It is concerned with the necessity of delight in an individual’s judgement of beauty and, in turn, how the delight perceived by one person can serve as an exemplary instance for everyone else. Going further than the second moment, the fourth is concerned not simply with the idea that the judgement of

⁴⁰⁸ Kant, p. 51

⁴⁰⁹ Kant, p. 52

⁴¹⁰ Kant, p. 52

the beautiful must be universally true, but how such universality works given the foregoing qualifications that aesthetics cannot be grounded in either ‘objective or cognitive judgement’.⁴¹¹

Kant’s solution to this problem, of how do we validate and spread the delight of a subjective individual to the subjective universal, is to appeal to the ‘*idea of a common sense*’.⁴¹² With this idea he is not referring to the shared understandings of a given group, regarding the widely known concepts that provide a guide to behaving and understanding the social world. What Kant is alluding to with his conception of common sense is a ‘subjective principle’ – working through feelings rather than understanding – that is shared by a group of individuals and provides them with knowledge of what pleases and displeases.⁴¹³

This idea of an innate sense that enables the transmission of aesthetic judgements through a socio-biological commonality may seem difficult one to grasp and even Kant asks, ‘*have we any ground for presupposing a common sense*’?⁴¹⁴ Yet he answers affirmatively, suggesting that ‘judgements *must*, together with their attendant conviction, admit of being universally communicated’.⁴¹⁵ Otherwise, they would all amount to ‘nothing but a mere subjective play of the powers of representation’.⁴¹⁶ Without a shared sense, without a common ground for communication, individuals would not be able to develop knowledge, understood in Kantian terms as the ‘subjective condition of the act of knowing’ about aesthetic or other matters.⁴¹⁷ Instead, they would be contained within personal bubbles, knowing what pleases them, but unable to share their understanding of that sensation with others. Simply, without a common sense individual *a* would not be able to express their understanding of the world to individual *b* and have individual *b* understand. Such an eventuality would mean the end of the idea of beauty as everything would become agreeable, pleasing but limited to the individual. That this is not the case, that I can write think about something beautiful, or ask “is the *Mona Lisa* beautiful?” and you can begin to formulate responses based on feelings within, is evidence for Kant of this shared sense in action.

Kant is careful to point out that such common sense is not synonymous with common responses – it is not the case that each individual judgement of beauty is a manifestation of a broader feeling of what beauty is. Rather, it is the case that each individual judgement transforms us into ‘suits for agreement from everyone else, because we are fortified with a ground common to all’.⁴¹⁸ Given this

⁴¹¹ Kant, p. 67

⁴¹² Kant, p. 68

⁴¹³ Kant, p. 68

⁴¹⁴ Kant, p. 69

⁴¹⁵ Kant, p. 69

⁴¹⁶ Kant, p. 69

⁴¹⁷ Kant, p. 69

⁴¹⁸ Kant, p. 68

shared possibility, Kant is confident in his assertion at the close of the fourth moment that ‘the *beautiful* is that which, apart from a concept, cognized as object of a *necessary* delight’.⁴¹⁹

Thus, for a judgement of beauty to be accepted as beautiful it must be made by an individual who has no interest in the object and can divorce their understanding of it from its content and shift to a strict scrutiny of formal qualities. All judgements of beauty are, therefore, universally available and are transmitted by a universal network of underlying feelings configured as a common sense. This outline covers the central points of Kant’s overarching theory. Turning now to work in more detail, I will unpack the particularities of conditioned beauty.

This term appears in Kant’s third moment of the beautiful, regarding the purpose of aesthetic objects. In that moment, he reiterates that judgements of the beautiful are fair and accurate if they are free from the influence of conceptual interest and personal taste but he also complicates this understanding. Separating beauty into two types, Kant suggests that those objects which inspire the foregoing disinterested judgements can be described as ‘free beauties’.⁴²⁰ Alongside this type of pure beauty Kant suggests that there is also a variety of objects which inspire judgements of adherent or conditioned beauty.⁴²¹ In such cases, the subject’s judgement of an object is influenced by a conceptual knowledge of that object and, consequently, an understanding of that object’s perfection. This possibility would seem to render such judgements good, yet Kant suggests that in such instances this conceptual frame operates in a slightly different way. Using examples of men and churches, he argues that we know – have conceptual knowledge of – what the ideal form of each should be. A man will have the correct number of limbs, facial features and these facets will be in proportion. A church will be crucifix shaped, directed eastwards and will contain the requisite features for prayer. Yet this conceptual knowledge is not as proscriptive as it may be with other potentially good objects. Indeed, whilst this conceptual knowledge may furnish subjects with ideas of the perfection of objects, ‘what the thing has to be’, it does not necessarily exert a definitive influence on subjective understandings of the object’s ideal use, what a thing has to do.⁴²² For example, it is entirely possible to demonstrate that a handsome man is handsome through recourse to conceptual rules. It is difficult, though, to say what a handsome man is good for with recourse to the same overarching rules, in the way that we might easily do so with an electric lawnmower and its conceptual qualifications. Consequently, whilst such examples are undeniably infused with good characteristics, they are not wholly good in a Kantian sense. More accurately, such objects ‘combine good with beauty’.⁴²³ This combination mars the purity of the latter (giving it conditions) but it does

⁴¹⁹ Kant, p. 71

⁴²⁰ Kant, p. 60

⁴²¹ Kant, p. 60

⁴²² Kant, p. 60

⁴²³ Kant, p. 61

not change the grounds of its consideration entirely. Hence, judgements in such instances are not regarded as those of free beauties, but as conditioned ones, a qualification that acknowledges the difference but still operate within the aesthetic realm.

Literature Review: Responding to *The Critique of Judgement*

This summation of one of the most stimulating and enduring texts in aesthetic philosophy is a necessarily brief outline, given the spatial constraints of this thesis. However, to reach this point of concise understanding, my research has drawn on several secondary materials. These textual responses to Kant can be broken down into various categories. Some of them can be considered as introductions to his theory that provide abridged readings and interpretations of key points. See *Kant's Aesthetic Theory: An Introduction* (1992) by Salim Kemal and *An Introduction to Kant's Aesthetics: Core Concepts and Problems* by Christian Helmut Wenzel for clear examples of this kind of work. Others present anthologies of essays that provide close analysis of certain elements of Kant's theory. See the second part of the Paul Guyer's *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (2005) for an emblematic anthology. Others still, offer an overview of Kant's work in relation to other aesthetic philosophies, effectively positioning and interrogating it in relation to the wider canon. See *Philosophical Legacies: Essays on the Thought of Kant, Hegel and Their Contemporaries* (2008) by Daniel O Dahlstrom for evidence of this kind of historic-philosophical reading. Work from within these categories has been undeniably helpful in the development of this chapter but the text that exerted the most significant influence on my understanding of Kant operates in a different one.

Henry E. Allison's *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (2001) is a companion piece to the primary resource. Structured in a way that maps closely onto the text of the original, Allison's work offers a step-by-step analysis that moves through Kant's conception of reflexive Judgement, the four moments of the aesthetic and onto his discussion of the moral significance of taste, genius in art and the sublime. It is a comprehensive study, covering 'virtually all of the central topics of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*' and offering a more detailed analysis than both introductory texts and essay collections.⁴²⁴ The former of which, by definition, tend to offer abridged overviews of the subject, whilst the latter isolate specific areas of theory for the sake of detail but risk a loss of wider perspective.

In addition to providing a rigorous analysis of the primary material, Allison's work also engages with the ongoing discussions in the field, variously setting up his ideas 'in opposition to many interpreters' and in other places following on the pathways that have been opened by foregoing

⁴²⁴ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 6

critics.⁴²⁵ In his outline of his understanding of reflective judgement, for instance, Allison acknowledges that his work is ‘following the suggestions of Beatrice Longuenesse’, a Kantian scholar from Princeton.⁴²⁶ By working in this way, Allison’s text gives insight into an ongoing dialogue, providing the reader with an introduction to the contemporary debates in the field of Kantian aesthetics. In combination with his detailed scrutiny of the primary text, the effect of this critically engaged work is to offer a strong, systematic, rigorous and self-aware reading of Kant’s aesthetics that serves as a necessary touchstone for any contemporary application of his thought.

Turning to this chapter’s interest in conditioned beauty, my understanding of this issue was initially developed through engagement with the materials detailed above. However, as my research progressed, and it became apparent that the idea had a utility in the context of cultural policy analysis, my explorations in the literature became more probing and specific. This led to the discovery of Paul Guyer’s “Free and Adherent Beauty: A Modest Proposal” from his *Values of Beauty* (2005) collection and Alexander Rueger’s essay “Beautiful Surfaces: Kant on Free and Adherent Beauty in Nature and Art” (2008). Both texts are consciously limited in their expectations. Prompted by the question ‘if adherent [conditioned] beauty presupposes a concept of the object, how can it be a kind of beauty at all?’, both Guyer and Rueger present relatively short responses that contribute to the ongoing attempt to resolve the complexities generated by this apparent contradiction. Neither makes claims to have resolved the issue definitively but each argues that they can move forward the discussion in this area in certain ways.

In Guyer’s case, he aims to demonstrate that the ‘three different approaches to the interpretation of Kant’s concept of adherent beauty’ that have come to populate the discourse can be unified.⁴²⁷ He suggests that the satisfaction gleaned from judgement of an object whose purpose has no impact on its form, the separate satisfactions gleaned from an object’s purpose and its form, and the satisfaction gleaned from the interaction of an object’s purpose and its form need not be considered as separate, unrelated pleasures. For Guyer, it doesn’t matter what anyone’s given response is, provided it is given in response to an object that has an ‘intended function’.⁴²⁸ He suggests that this shared basis, like a family tree, means that a parent object can generate three different judgements as offspring but that these are connected by their shared origin.

Rueger is interested in the free play of the imagination at the moment of aesthetic judgement and how it might be influenced by the conceptual framework that pre-emptively shapes our understanding of the object under consideration. Taking the example of a rose, Rueger points out

⁴²⁵ Allison, p. 7

⁴²⁶ Allison, p. 7. Longuenesse would continue this critical back and forth with her 2003 essay, “Kant’s Theory of Judgement, and Judgements of Taste: On Henry Allison’s *Kant’s Theory of Taste*”, which she describes as a responsive work that attempted ‘to pick up the ball and suggest a few ways in which it could be carried further’ (p. 162)

⁴²⁷ Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 129

⁴²⁸ Guyer, p. 129

that to say, “this rose is beautiful” demonstrates a conceptual understanding of what a rose is. ‘We perceive this form in a perfectly determinate way; we can, if we like, describe it in concepts’.⁴²⁹ Given this fact, Rueger questions whether it is possible, as Kant’s demand for disinterestedness suggests, to put oneself ‘artificially in a precognitive state’ to pass a valid aesthetic judgement.⁴³⁰ Rueger goes on to explore this question through the consideration of the different ways that we can scrutinise the surface of an object and its whole purpose. He ultimately suggests that if the surface of an object and a consideration of its whole purpose can be rendered distinct then clear conceptual knowledge of an object’s purpose and perfection *and* the free aesthetic judgement of it can develop simultaneously. This holds true, he suggests, except in the field of fine art, where the surfaces of object are the direct result of the creator’s purpose to make beautiful work. This underlying connection complicates our assessments and whilst the aesthetic judgement of art is still possible, Rueger suggests that ‘it remains to be seen [.....] under what conditions judgements of free beauty *without* accompanying judgements of perfection’ are allowed within Kant’s understanding of fine art.⁴³¹

By keeping themselves focused on these particular issues, the scale of the ambition of Guyer’s and Rueger’s work, rather than reducing the impact of these essays, is to the benefit of each. By recognising that neither can ‘resolve all of the tensions and apparent inconsistencies in Kant’s treatment’, each work provides a detailed scrutiny of different facets of the overarching problem and presents them in an accessible and more readily digestible way (in the sense that the argument of a short essay is easier to grasp than the argument of book).⁴³² In doing so, these essays offer useful reflections on some of the complexities of conditioned beauty and artistic work that can be easily and effectively drawn out of their original iterations and interwoven in the analysis of aesthetics and cultural policy offered in this chapter.

This brings us to the close of this three-tiered literature review which has, over the preceding pages, outlined the policy context, explored the policy formulation process and detailed the core components and some of the recent responses to the aesthetic philosophy that serves as the thinking tool for this chapter.

Supporting Excellence in the Arts: Outline

Sir Brian McMaster was invited by James Purnell, the incoming Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, to ‘consider how public subsidy can best support excellence in the arts’, in July 2007.⁴³³ In

⁴²⁹ Alexander Rueger, “Beautiful Surfaces: Kant on Free and Adherent Beauty in Nature and Art” in *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 16 no. 3, 2008, p. 539

⁴³⁰ Rueger, p. 539

⁴³¹ Rueger, p. 549

⁴³² Rueger, p. 536

⁴³³ McMaster, p. 5

his efforts to formulate a response, McMaster spoke with 'over 140 members of the cultural community, [processed] 249 written consultations and [conducted] an online public consultation'.⁴³⁴ These efforts were guided by an attempt to answer the following questions:

'How the system of public sector support for the arts can encourage excellence, risk-taking and innovation?

How artistic excellence can encourage wider and deeper engagement with the arts by audience?

How to establish a light touch and non-bureaucratic method to judge the quality of the arts in the future?'.⁴³⁵

The responses McMaster presented in his finished review drew a few conclusions and offered a range of suggestions. Specifically, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement* offered 26 recommendations for policy makers, ranging from the call to prioritise excellent and diverse work that represents the breadth of 21st century Britain to the suggestion that DCMS, Arts Council and the Treasury should collaborate to provide ten-year funding allowances to ten organisations with the 'most innovative ambition'.⁴³⁶ He proposed a new valuation method for the quality of artistic work, 'based on self-assessment and peer review' that appeared to signal a clear interest in the judgement of intrinsic outcomes as opposed to the measurement of instrumental outputs. Significantly, for the first time in Arts Council history, he offered a *specific definition* of what excellent art and culture is. Explicitly, 'Excellent culture takes and combines new meanings, gives us new insights and new understandings of the world around us and is relevant to every single one of us'.⁴³⁷

Coming after ten years of cultural policy that had been criticised for increasingly prioritising the delivery of instrumental results and stifling creative practice under the setting of targets, this range of more intrinsically engaged suggestions were very warmly received. Both the Secretary of State and the Chair of the Arts Council described McMaster's review as a timely and welcome contribution. However, this celebration and the apparent resurgence of more intrinsic interests, belies a number of internal contradictions and external challenges that McMaster fails to acknowledge. In doing so, he creates a paradoxical blind spot that undermines his position and the strength of the claims that he makes from it.

⁴³⁴ McMaster, p. 6

⁴³⁵ McMaster, p. 6

⁴³⁶ McMaster, p. 16

⁴³⁷ McMaster, p. 9

Supporting Excellence in the Arts: Internal Contradictions

The definition of excellence offered by McMaster is a central part of the review's attempt to redress 'the fundamental mismatch between the way we talk about culture and the values we attach to it'.⁴³⁸ Positioned at the opening of the document, in chapter 1 section 1 (1.1), the definition immediately showcases McMaster's interest in the intrinsic and more qualitative potential of great art. He suggests that excellent work (1) *takes and combines* new meanings, (2) *gives us* new insights and new understandings of the world around us and (3) is relevant to every single one of us. Paying attention to the italicised text, McMaster positions excellence as a quality produced *by* cultural objects and practices. *Culture* is active, *it* takes and combines meanings, *it gives* us insight.

This understanding suggests that *the thing* that makes a given art work excellent, for all of the qualitative affect that it might generate, is bound within the objective facets of that art work and not in the subjective act of interpretation that it prompts. This conception contrasts with Kant who builds the *Critique of Judgement* on the foundational proposition that the judgement of aesthetic quality is subjective by its very nature. Indeed, McMaster doesn't acknowledge the subjective judgement as a necessary part of the process. There isn't even a subject in McMaster's definition, bar the universal subject (us), who has no choice but to accept high quality work as relevant to them. This clear demarcation between an objective and subjective understanding of quality can be explained as the articulation of two different aesthetic ideas. Kant's *Critique of Judgement* plots a 'reception aesthetic' whilst McMaster's definition is emblematic of a 'creation aesthetic'.⁴³⁹

By shifting the determining ground of aesthetic quality in this fashion, McMaster's definition does two things. Firstly, it provides a theoretical opposition to Kant. Secondly, and of more concern for his claims of offering a radical turn in policy, his grounding of aesthetic quality in the objective components of a work enables McMaster to establish a connection between an art work and the other objective factors that inform its creation. Going beyond the opening outline of complex meanings, new insights and relevance, he suggests that the quality of work is also contingent on many other real-world processes that are 'crucial in supporting excellence'.⁴⁴⁰ These include effective governance (1.5), the concern for cultural education (1.6) and the offer of continuing professional development (1.7). McMaster is not necessarily wrong in his claims that these things can help facilitate excellence. Indeed, stable governance and clear leadership can provide a space and direction for artistic creation, cultural education enables children and adults to engage with more complex works and glean deeper meanings, and the provision of training for artists nurtures the development of new techniques.

⁴³⁸ McMaster, p. 9

⁴³⁹ Allison, p. 271

⁴⁴⁰ McMaster, p. 12

However, his turn to these factors complicates his position. His opening stance defined excellence in relation to its ability to stimulate broadly qualitative and affective experiences that were of intrinsic worth (giving people meaning, insight and relevance) and did so because of inherent qualities. His expanded position suggests that an objective support structure plays a *crucial* role in helping such excellent work develop. Interestingly, the elements of the support structure that McMaster singles out as influential correlate with some of the priorities of the instrumental agenda that has permeated Arts Council policy in the foregoing decade: efficient governance, arts in education and career development and training. In certain instances, McMaster even goes further than this bringing together and actively recommends that arts organisations continue to work in these areas to meet wider government targets. Looking to education, he advises that ‘cultural organisations be proactive in meeting the extra demand for their work’.⁴⁴¹ The extra demand he is referring to is connected to the recently announced Child Plan of December 2007. This was a government backed scheme that aimed to ‘engage [children] in five hours of cultural activity a week’.⁴⁴² In his encouragement of arts organisations to help meet this aim, McMaster emphasises that ‘excellence and depth of experience must form the core’ of any work done in this area but, even so, his commitment of the arts to the delivery of a nakedly instrumental objective is palpable.⁴⁴³

However, McMaster does not acknowledge this commitment, nor does he comment on his overlapping positions and he fails to recognise that his expanded understanding of quality incorporates notably instrumental aspects and grants them significant influence. Given the claims that McMaster’s work will ‘mark a real shift in how we view and talk about the arts in this country’, the continuing (though unacknowledged) testimony to the importance of these instrumental connections is problematic.⁴⁴⁴ It indicates that a document commissioned in response to the growing frustration with, and criticisms of, instrumental arts policy contradicts itself and, without acknowledging this contradiction, pushes for further instrumentally directed work in certain cases. In doing so, McMaster’s text undermines his position as the author of a radical intrinsic turn and weakens the legitimacy of the primary claims that he makes from this position. In this case, the definition of excellence, the clearest statement of what the government and the Arts Council recognise as excellent work of intrinsic value has been compromised.

This unacknowledged contradiction within McMaster’s stance extends further than the shifting nature of his position taking, generally. It goes so far as to manifest in divergent understandings of the same terminology, with McMaster offering inversed readings of the same issues at different points in the text. Focusing on the relationship between relevance and quality, the forthcoming

⁴⁴¹ McMaster, p. 14

⁴⁴² McMaster, p. 14

⁴⁴³ McMaster, p. 14

⁴⁴⁴ Purnell in McMaster, p. 4

analysis will plot how McMaster's understanding of this association changes throughout the review. It will then draw out the implications of this, showing what each conception potentially implies for art and quality, before finally outlining the impact that McMaster's inconsistency had on his aim to bring change to the policy process. By working in this way, this second analysis of internal contradictions will further demonstrate the socially instrumental considerations that inform McMaster's work.

The third condition of McMaster's definition of excellence proposes that the highest quality work is *relevant to every single one of us*. This means that aesthetic excellence is not tied to a range of other socially or culturally influential factors. An individual's class, educational achievement cultural background or gender position would exert no influence on the perception of aesthetic quality as understood here. In effect, excellent work is excellent for everyone. Despite previously offering a counter to Kant's foundational proposition regarding the necessary role of the subject in the process of aesthetic judgement, the articulation of McMaster's thought in this case is strictly Kantian. The suggestion of the indiscriminate appeal of the highest quality work mirrors the claims of Kant's second moment of the *Critique of Judgement*: that all beautiful work can be appreciated universally. This is because, with no connection to purpose, interest, or sensual preferences, the beautiful object will give no particular reason as to why certain people are (or are not) pleased by it. It will simply please everyone. Initially, then, this conception of the relationship between relevance and excellence is clearly grounded in a well-established aesthetic philosophical thought. Consequently, in the earliest stages of the review, McMaster can be interpreted as adopting a Kantian Universalist stance that emphasises the intrinsic value of the arts through its description of the universal relevance of high quality work.

This coherence with wider aesthetic thought has the potential to bring forth a number of positive interpretations of *Supporting Excellence*. As a Kantian Universalist text, the review may serve as a transformative document. It doesn't just tweak the specifics of a foregoing aesthetic policy, slightly shifting emphasis in approach or changing a word or two on the organisational agenda, as the dropping of "fine" in fine arts did in the renewal of the Arts Council's Royal Charter in 1967. More drastically, by proclaiming the universal appeal of excellent work, *Supporting Excellence* offers a foundation for a policy that ostensibly ignores the expectations placed upon art by those concerned with its social applications. In doing so, this early conception of relevance privileges the artist, relieving them of their instrumental obligations, and giving them the freedom to pursue the development of aesthetically assured work. The potential value of this is that this freedom will enable artists to produce high quality work that is deeply affecting and, so, radically inclusive. McMaster's proposition, thus, has the potential to solve the access problem through the utilisation

of radically intrinsic means. This is an eventuality in which both parties under the Arts Council's concern benefit: artists would not feel pressured into acting like social workers, whilst the public would be presented with work of such quality that they could not stay away. In this regard, *Supporting Excellence* reads as an optimistic, lofty and challenging document that, even though outlining policy foundations that may be difficult to establish, might certainly be applauded for the directness of its intentions.

However, this Kantian enunciation of the relationship between excellence and relevance is not the only one that McMaster offers in the document. Later, he shifts his position with a forceful assertion, 'it is my belief that culture *can only be excellent when it is relevant*, and thus *nothing can be excellent without reflecting the society* which produces and experiences it' [my emphasis].⁴⁴⁵ From here he goes on to outline a number of good practice guidelines and social connections that art must make if it is to be considered excellent. These include a commitment to increasing diversity in the broadest possible fashion, the increase of international comparisons and the responsible use of public subsidy. This shift marks a direct inversion of his foregoing understanding of the connection between excellence and relevance. The effect of which is to place artistic quality in a necessarily conditional relationship to the context in which the work under scrutiny manifests. This new consideration of the issue of quality and public relations thus changes the idea that "excellence is relevant" into "relevance is excellent" and, so, alters McMaster's stance from that of Kantian Universalist to Socially Conditional Aesthete. In a similar fashion to the expanded positions discussed above, McMaster does not explain why his view undergoes such a radical shift or, even, acknowledge that it does so. The potential consequences of this move, however, are myriad.

Positively, and unsurprisingly, by inverting his position McMaster presents a counter to potential criticisms that might be levelled at his foregoing, Kantian suggestions. By noting the connections between social context, artistic production, and evaluation and making arguments to strengthen these connections, McMaster's second understanding of the relationship between excellence and relevance may help combat the culturally blinkering potential of his earlier Kantian language. Indeed, by acknowledging that the perception of artistic quality has some social connection and is not just a universally available, neutral attribute that all groups in all societies will respond to equally, this approach makes cultural relations that are rendered invisible by Kant's Universalist logic noticeable. This socially conditional aesthetics has the potential to challenge the naturalisation of a particular cultural hierarchy and the privileging of certain forms within that hierarchy and offer a base for change.⁴⁴⁶ Admittedly, this second conception doesn't go so far as this. It doesn't call out the current hierarchy and demand alterations in funding patterns. Nevertheless, it offers steps

⁴⁴⁵ McMaster, p. 11

⁴⁴⁶ For a discussion of this hierarchy in practice please refer back to the outline of the "officially valued" culture presented on pp. 111-112

towards bringing the arts out of the deeply political apolitical ether and grounding them in the lived experience of citizens, thus opening up the possibility for an expanded understanding of quality, a more responsive approach to policy, and a consequent increase in appeal to currently disengaged groups.

Critically, whilst McMaster's turn away from Kantian aesthetics, in favour of a more direct consideration of social issues, will not necessarily lead to bad art it does have the potential to give rise to a limited kind of excellence. In the extreme, this forceful and conditional social turn suggested by McMaster has provided the framework for a present-centric mode of cultural assessment that is just as harmful as the cultural hierarchy that is hidden by the naturalising power of universal language. By asserting that excellent work *must* necessarily be connected to, and reflective of, the social context from which it originates, this understanding positions art within certain parameters. It implies that artistic quality has a time limit and as a social scene develops a given art work may become dated, disconnected from its surroundings and so decline in quality because what it presents no longer relates to the audience's experiences in the world. McMaster's socially conditional turn therefore has the potential to render high-quality art works perishable, ostensibly giving them an expiry date. It could thus be argued that McMaster's inverted understanding of excellence provides a framework for assessment that consistently rips up and re-works notions of cultural value, perhaps ensuring that quality is always clear to a contemporary audience, but more worryingly overturning long-established markers of value with little dialogue and for no greater reason than temporal lapse and some ill-defined sense of social development.

This outcome is extreme but nevertheless possible. A more likely result is that by rendering excellence conditional on the extent to which a given work reflects the social context from which it come, the McMaster review fails to alter the conception of art as a socially engaged practice with the potential to deliver instrumental improvements. This failure means that there will be, in some form, and despite the trumpets of radical change from leading figures in the sector, a continuation of the instrumentally oriented and socially active approach that McMaster was responding to. As a telling example of this continuation, it is instructive to look to the *Great Arts for Everyone* agenda, published in 2008. This approach was presented by the organisation as an unequivocal restatement of the Arts Council's dominant interest in the highest quality art work. Following the publication of *Supporting Excellence in the Arts*, this new agenda claimed to deviate from the socially instrumental interests that informed forgoing efforts and primarily focus on 'creating the conditions by which great art can happen'.⁴⁴⁷ Even here, though, it is evident from the outline of organisational priorities that the social application of the arts still holds an influential position. Of the four development

⁴⁴⁷ Arts Council England, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework for the Arts, 2008-2011 (Word Document)*, (London: Arts Council England, 2008), p. 1

priorities identified in *Great Art for Everyone*, a commitment to the visual arts is the only explicitly aesthetic and intrinsically engaged priority. The other three have clear social applications. The development of policy and best practice around the growing use of digital media has the potential for a number of positive impacts on organisational efficiency, workforce skills development and the creation of new financial opportunities. The continuing efforts to engage young people in the arts has a clear interest in the broader educational development of children, more specific training in arts fields and, ultimately, the encouragement of 'fairer access and entry to arts professions'.⁴⁴⁸ Finally, the decision to support the cultural Olympiad ahead of London 2012 positions the Arts Council as part of the state apparatus mobilised to deliver an event of tremendous sporting, economic and national significance.

Supporting Excellence in the Arts: External Challenges

The limitations imposed on McMaster's radical turn by his unclear and contradictory expression of ideas is further hindered by the context in which his review appeared. *Supporting Excellence* was published during a period of crisis. In January 2008, the Arts Council was attempting to deal with the fallout of a funding allocation that was perceived to have been unjustifiably harsh. In October 2007, the Arts Council was informed by the DCMS that, contrary to expectations, it would receive an above inflation uplift to grant-in-aid of 3.3% between 2008/09 and 2010/11. 'This was acknowledged by everyone to be a significant win' after the slowed funding growth since 2005.⁴⁴⁹ However, the jubilation from this win was short lived because, despite this unexpected rise, the Arts Council ultimately removed support from 185 organisations and reduced the amount given to a further 27. This cull provoked uproar and was derided as a clandestine move by many artists in the sector: "secrecy is an Arts Council default position – they don't know how else to do it".⁴⁵⁰

The legitimacy of this characterisation can certainly be questioned. In its defence the Arts Council is on record as having sent two letters, in May and October 2007, that warned funded organisations of the possibility of a review of the Regularly Funded Organisation portfolio. Nevertheless, the reputation of the Arts Council was severely damaged and the backlash from the arts community was savage. 'On 9 January 2008 Peter Hewitt faced an angry meeting organised by the actors' union Equity at the Young Vic Theatre, where 500 booing practitioners passed a vote of no confidence in the Arts Council'.⁴⁵¹ Hewitt resigned shortly afterward. He was succeeded as Chief Executive by Alan Davey who quickly sort to diffuse the situation. He commissioned Genista

⁴⁴⁸ Arts Council England, *Great Art for Everyone*, p. 6

⁴⁴⁹ Genista McIntosh, foreword by Alan Davey, *Review of Arts Council England's regularly funded organisations investment strategy 2007-2008 – Lessons learned*, (London: Arts Council England, 2008), p. 14

⁴⁵⁰ McIntosh, *Lessons Learned*, p. 39

⁴⁵¹ Hewison, p. 115

McIntosh to review the investment process following the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2007. Her finished report, *Lessons Learned*, appeared six months later, in July 2008, and made 11 recommendations aimed to help the Arts Council redress the reputational damage and clarify confusion over their funding process. Davey's response to these recommendations and the transparency with which he articulated it 'began to restore the trust that had been so damaged in 2007'.⁴⁵²

At the time of publication of *Supporting Excellence*, however, the crisis that was caused by the funding allocation was still in full effect. In this context, a radical change in policy approach was not tenable, with incoming Chief Executive Davey primarily concerned with stabilising the situation. Thus, whilst some of McMaster's suggestions found their way into the Arts Council's working practices post-crisis (for example, artist-on-artist peer-reviews were reintroduced) these shifts can most accurately be interpreted as an attempt to appease artists in some way, rather than as indications of an organisational embrace of a radical new policy direction. According to Hewison, 'Davey was careful to give a bland response to the McMaster report' and not tie himself or the organisation to it.⁴⁵³

This crisis at the Arts Council was matched by comparable instability in the DCMS. At the time of the publication of the McMaster review in January 2008, Purnell was being promoted to Work and Pensions Secretary. His successor, Andy Burnham, would hold the post for a little less than 18 months before he, in turn, was replaced by Ben Bradshaw, in June 2009. He held the office until New Labour's defeat in the general election of May 2010. This latter run of ministers, three in three years, was part of a wider period of uncertainty and flux in the New Labour government. This was caused by several factors, including questions over the government's culpability and response to the economic crash of 2007/08, the breaking of the MPs expenses scandal in 2009, the party's disastrous performance in the local and European elections of the same year and the numerous challenges to Gordon Brown's leadership (one of which, coincidentally, was instigated by Purnell).

The problem with such consistent shuffling, ignoring the failure of the party to win the 2010 election, is that it pushed the Secretaries of State for Culture into reactive rather than proactive positions. Unlike Smith and Jowell, who had the time to research and develop particular policy approaches, Purnell, Burnham and Bradshaw took up office in conditions of increasing uncertainty. The effect of which was that each struggled to develop and implement a new policy approach and, alternatively, drew on well-established evaluative and argumentative approaches to characterise their understanding of the value of the sector and illustrate the direction they wanted it to head in.

⁴⁵² Hewison, p. 149

⁴⁵³ Hewison, p. 147

In Purnell's case, whilst his zeal for cultural excellence was evident, the simple fact was that he was not in post long enough to make any substantial changes.

Burnham is a little more complicated. On taking up the post, he positioned himself as a successor in the mould of Purnell. In a meeting with Davey, shortly after his move to the department, Burnham stressed that 'he felt that his views are broadly in line with those of his predecessor'.⁴⁵⁴ However, his response to the *A Night Less Ordinary* scheme which ran from February 2009 to March 2011 and offered 'over half a million (618,000) free theatre tickets to anyone under 26 at more than 200 venues throughout England', suggests that his policy approach was more in line with Jowell's.⁴⁵⁵ After taking in a performance, he commented 'we all know how a visit to the theatre can be a life-changing experience, and it's incredibly exciting to imagine our theatres full to bursting point with young people. This new scheme sees Labour values in action'.⁴⁵⁶ In a similar fashion to *Government and the Value of Culture*, this comment showcases Burnham's acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of artistic experience (in this case, its life-changing potential) but frames it in relation to (if not as an exponent of) an array of particular socio-political concerns (Labour values in action). In this way, Burnham's words provide clear evidence of the continued governmental recognition of the social potential of the state supported arts and, so, indicate that his department's expectations in the body that oversees them is unlikely to lessen.

Bradshaw's tenure was marked by a slightly different approach. Taking office in June 2009, his work was informed by the Labour government's attempt to fashion an effective response to the economic crash. Returning to elements of thinking developed by Smith, he opted to emphasise the financial potential of the cultural sector in this time of crisis. Speaking at *The State of the Arts* conference in January 2010, Bradshaw made the centrality of economics to his approach clear. 'The arts are critical to our country's future prosperity. They offer incredible value in terms of return; every pound invested in arts and culture generates £5 in the economy as a whole'.⁴⁵⁷ By reasoning in this way, he reveals the character of his expectations for the Arts Council and their supported forms. Bradshaw thus provides an emblematic demonstration of how 'in time of austerity, publicly funded arts will be asked to justify themselves in terms that are comparable to those used to justify funding services with which they're in competition'.⁴⁵⁸ In other words that, in times of economic difficulty, the worth of public expenditure(s) will be measured and understood through a universally

⁴⁵⁴ Arts Council England, *Notes on Council Meeting January 2008*, (London: ACE, 2008), p. 2, available at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/google-search/?q=burnham>, accessed May 2015

⁴⁵⁵ Arts Council England, *A Night Less Ordinary*, available at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/arts-council-initiatives/past-initiatives/a-night-less-ordinary/>, accessed May 2015

⁴⁵⁶ Arts Council England, *Great Arts For Everyone: Arts Council England Newsletter (Northwest Edition: April 2009)*, (London: ACE, 2009), available at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/newsletter/northwest/ArtsCouncilEnglandNorthWestAprilNewsletter.htm>, accessed May 2015

⁴⁵⁷ a-n Editorial, *State of the Arts 2010*

⁴⁵⁸ David Edgar, *Looking Back, Moving Forwards (Closing Speech, State of the Arts 2012)*, available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/david_edgar_sota12speech_final.pdf, accessed May 2015, p. 2

transferrable financial register. Thus, he effectively showcases that the governmental interest in the social utility of the arts persisted under his tenure, albeit in a slightly different way than that of the work of his immediate predecessors.

The Consideration of Conditioned Beauty

Acknowledging the continued political interest in the potential of the arts to generate a range of socio-economic impacts, it is evident that the call for a hands-off approach to the arts and a re-centring of more intrinsic concerns articulated (in problematic fashion) by McMaster's review was not to be successfully realised across the course of New Labour's governance. These examples have again shown that the administration took a persistent interest in instrumental impact of the work of the Arts Council and its supported organisations, frequently attempting to direct those organisations towards certain thematic concerns or frame their efforts with a language that presented them as an extension of government values. This suggests that more than just being compromised by the internal contradictions of the text, McMaster's work, or any policy work, was prey to the pressures of the context in which it manifests.

Reflecting on this discovery provides an indication that there will be some inevitable social connection between arts policy and where it manifests. There are too many competing factors and agendas for any aesthetically motivated arts policy to be "purely" realised in the real-world, even if it were articulated clearly. In light of this, it becomes quickly apparent that the binary understanding of policy drivers as either instrumental or intrinsic is a flawed one because, at a foundational level, all arts policy is socially informed and instrumental in some way. The extent of this influence may vary with the articulation of each policy and the demands made by governments in response to shifting contexts, but the fundamental point is irrefutable. Accepting this, the closing phases of this chapter will suggest that rather than be considered on a spectrum that spans from the instrumental to the intrinsic, a more effective way of considering the aesthetic aspects of cultural policy can be developed through the application of Kant's notion of conditioned beauty.⁴⁵⁹

This terminology can be comfortably applied to provide a concise description of the problem detailed in the analysis of the relations between *Supporting Excellence's* more aesthetic intentions and the frames of the policy context that generated it. In this case, McMaster's desire to nurture excellence (free beauty for Kant) is compromised by the fact that his approach must operate in accordance with a collection of pre-determined instrumental concerns that collate to government interest and the Arts Council's wider agenda (Kant's conceptual parameters). The influences of these concerns are various, and they pervade McMaster's policy, yet he is unable to clearly reconcile some

⁴⁵⁹ As outlined on p. 155-156

of the contrasts that they open up. The effect of which is that he ultimately develops a see-sawing approach to aesthetic policy, alternately articulating instrumental values through intrinsic language, and vice versa. This leads him to offer a complex and problematic understanding of excellence that, though not entirely coherent, is evidently more socially responsive than socially autonomous.

From within the polarised debate of instrumental vs. intrinsic policy, this problematic offer could be interpreted as a unilateral failure of the intrinsic policy driver to lead the policy process. This suggestion would quickly return us to a stagnant and well-trod conflict-oriented understanding. However, utilising the concept of conditioned beauty it is possible to sidestep this repetition. It enables the recognition that McMaster is outlining some policy recommendation that both support the pursuit of work of the highest aesthetic quality but also that this work is framed by certain expectations to contribute to social interests. In effect, work that has the potential to be both beautiful *and* good. By shifting perspectives in this way, this Kantian analysis moves beyond understandings of policy as *either* instrumental *or* intrinsically oriented. The dual identity of conditioned beauty, which recognises both the aesthetic and the good nature of cultural policy, effectively illuminates a new understanding of the relationship between the two ideas, challenging a harmful and not entirely accurate binary in the process. The value of doing so is that it provides the means to better examine the subtleties of this relationship, opening new pathways for the interrogation and analysis of the position of excellence in Arts Council policy. To demonstrate this value, I will now offer a case study that combines input from Arts Council policy makers with the experience of a funded theatre company. This study will showcase that the delivery of popularly received high quality work can exist in a framework in which wider social expectations and assessment processes also operate.

The Frames of Excellence

With regard to the approach to, and understanding of, artistic excellence in Arts Council thought, both policy workers consulted for this thesis acknowledged that the binary understanding came to dominate organisational discussions in the period leading up to and, even, going past McMaster's review. David Micklem suggested that during his time at the Council the merits of 'excellence and access, were very equally debated'.⁴⁶⁰ Mark Hollander comments that these debates were of such significance that 'we all got a bit hung up on the pendulum swing between those two extremes of the spectrum'.⁴⁶¹ Both go on to comment, however, that in spite of these lurching conversations about the merits of intrinsic and instrumental policy drivers, the concern for excellence still persisted

⁴⁶⁰ Micklem, *Appendix*, p. 233

⁴⁶¹ See Interview with Mark Hollander, *Appendix*, p. 255

in practice: 'one was never [fully] at the expense of the other'.⁴⁶² Hollander suggests that this is because theatre companies, even instrumentally engaged one, considered the delivery of high quality performance work as 'what they're there for and, you know, within their own camera lens they see what they do as excellent'.⁴⁶³

The methods of assessment that the Arts Council utilised to assess potential candidates was varied. It incorporated the cross-examination of

'self-evaluation and what organisations say about themselves, through audience response, press response, all that external attention, through [...] the reporting process where independent artists would give show reports, all these ingredients of the programming and then at some point also the observation of any given officer and how they see that organisation'.⁴⁶⁴

This breadth of assessment meant that excellence was not a singular target positioned at the top of a table or a quality measured against a set definition. More accurately, excellence was identified through a flexible process of assessment that allowed for the difference of different companies.

This mix might prompt calls of relativism and the concern that excellence for one is not the same as excellence for all. For Micklem and Hollander, the counter to this suggestion, and what unifies this range of considerations, is the portfolio and 'whether it kind of looks broadly okay'.⁴⁶⁵ Is it offering the best kind of work at a national level? Is it offering it locally? Are the best examples of new work being well supported? Is there enough provision for the assured presentation of classics? These questions spring from the base recognition that excellence for one *is not* excellence for all. Different supported organisations will offer different types of work, with different modes of presentation and establish different relationships with their audiences. Therefore, the definition of excellence can be different in different cases. Explicitly, what makes a performance to 1,500 people in the Olivier auditorium of the National Theatre excellent may not be what makes an immersive performance by Punch Drunk to 40 people in an adapted warehouse excellent. To fall into the trap of pursuing a singular definition, "'it's great art? It's not great art?'" , is to miss that the Arts Council services several different audiences with a range of different needs.⁴⁶⁶

It is here that we start to notice the social frames around excellence. However, though this suggestion of needs points to the possible social and instrumental applications of art detailed throughout this chapter, it is important to recognise the assessment framework of quality operated

⁴⁶² Hollander, p. 255

⁴⁶³ Hollander, p. 255

⁴⁶⁴ Hollander, pp. 256-257

⁴⁶⁵ Hollander, p. 257

⁴⁶⁶ Hollander, p. 257

relatively unimpeded within those parameters. For Hollander, in the moments of closeness between arts organisations and the socially instrumental interests of the Arts Council, the role of assessment process was to articulate the quality of the work of the given organisation 'against those [social] priorities rather than redefining the company in order to squeeze itself into Arts Council or Treasury priorities' at the expense of the quality of its output.⁴⁶⁷ Understood in this way, it is clear that theatre companies may have been working to deliver instrumental results but that these theatre companies had an interest in this instrumental area to begin with and, moreover, the aesthetic qualities of their work were not compromised. Put another way, there may be identifiable social conditions around their work but these conditions did not stop the experimental play of the creative process in the pursuit of excellent results. In effect, to the extent that the interest of theatre companies cohered with wider Arts Council interest, that company was free to develop work as it saw fit, provided that it serviced this wider interest in the highest quality fashion.

As an example of this kind of socially conditioned but aesthetically attractive performance, it is useful to look to the work of Black Country Touring. This company is described by their Artistic Director, Stephen Johnstone, as having an 'inherent social function'.⁴⁶⁸ Although uneasy to go on and describe the company as a social worker that is engaged in addressing specific social problems, this function does mean that the work of Black Country Touring correlated with a number of the Arts Council's more instrumental interests during the period of study; social inclusion, youth engagement, diverse audiences. This is evident in the range of their performances and in the methods that they use to develop them. Each of the forthcoming performances utilised oral history collection techniques and worked with local people (from Eastern European shopkeepers to South Asian housewives) to gather the stories that they wished to present. These stories were then adapted by professional artists, often working with amateur or even non-artists, and presented in a fashion that gave voice to this newly discovered and often marginalised resource. *Apna Ghar* (2006) explored the domestic experiences of South Asian women and presented them through culturally diverse dance practices that were performed by children from local schools in collaboration with professional artists. *The Corner Shop* (2008-09) was a performative exploration of the lives of the different people from different backgrounds that run these essential, small-scale local businesses. In addition to giving voice to previously ignored personal stories, the performance also presented a grander reflection on the issues of immigration, communal change and the establishment of identity. *Eat!* (2012-13) was a co-production with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre that took food as its primary focus and examined how its significance shifted in stories of war, poverty, celebrations, feasts, famines and fasts. By working in this way, the performance presented a number

⁴⁶⁷ Hollander, p. 254

⁴⁶⁸ See Interview with Stephen Johnstone, *Appendix*, p. 220

of culturally specific relationships with food but also showcased a unifying significance of it for us as humans.

The responses to these socially engaged show were resoundingly positive. Johnstone comments that in feedback exercises ‘we get very high satisfaction ratings’.⁴⁶⁹ He goes on to qualify these results by stating that a reason for such positive impact is that ‘we get audiences who are not theatre literate, who are not dance literate so as long as the shows are accessible and they have impact, which they do, they wow people because they’re not used to it and that’s great’.⁴⁷⁰ This clarification may appear to open the door to the claims of relativism once again. However, if it is remembered that Black Country Touring is incorporated into the portfolio to deliver high quality work of a different kind to that presented by other companies then this challenge can be effectively neutralised. To showcase this, it is useful to re-apply the comparison detailed above: to expect Black Country Touring to deliver the same kind of quality work in the same way as the National Theatre is to misunderstand the intentions and expectations of the former organisation, both socially and aesthetically. In this way, I suggest that the work of Black Country Touring provides a strong demonstration of how a state supported theatre company can operate in accordance with the idea of conditioned beauty; effectively engaging with a range of identified social issues and priority group but doing so through the delivery of innovative, high-quality work.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with an introduction of the recent debate around the position of instrumental and intrinsic policy drivers in the state supported cultural sector. It went on to plot the growing frustration articulated by government ministers, Arts Council staff, leaders of artistic organisations and thinktank researchers that demanded the need for change. From here, the chapter offered a three-tiered literature review. This review explored the trajectory of Arts Council policy (and the position of excellence within that) between 2000 and 2008 and offered thorough readings of some of the contemporary reflections and calls for change. It went on to outline the range of different Cultural History, Cultural Policy Studies and Policy Mechanics texts that have contributed to my understanding of how policy works, from the point of formulation to implementation. In its third phase, it unpacked the mechanics of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy and highlighted the secondary materials that have helped shape my understanding of his work. At this point, Kant’s idea of conditioned beauty was singled out as a particularly useful lens through which the policies towards excellence might be read and better characterised.

⁴⁶⁹ Johnstone, p. 220

⁴⁷⁰ Johnstone, p. 220

Having established the interdisciplinary theoretical base for this chapter, the work here offered a close reading and wider scrutiny of McMaster's *Supporting Excellence in the Arts*. This analysis drew out the contradictions within the text and also pointed out the external challenges that hindered its claims to radically recentre the pursuit of artistic excellence in cultural policy. Having identified the problems of McMaster's document, the analysis developed a clear hypothesis as to why such problematic complexity exists. Namely, that policy is ultimately instrumental and that this document fails to reconcile its more intrinsic aims with the mode through which they manifest, thereby pushing itself into an impossible position and undermining the legitimacy of its claims. This latter, comparative work brought to bear a Kantian vocabulary that offered a way forward for more nuanced considerations of aesthetic policy in the future. Explicitly, that all aesthetic policies, whether created by the Arts Council, the UK government or another body, must be recognised as policies *of* and *for* conditioned beauty. This would enable policy makers to move past the harmful and limiting binary of intrinsic vs instrumental notions of cultural value and enable policy makers and arts organisations to better deliver work with social and aesthetic affect.

Conclusions

This thesis opened with an account of the development of governmental and Arts Council policy from 1979 to 2015. From this historical base, the thesis went on to examine the period 1996/97-2007/08 in detail, taking as its prompt the interrogation of Tony Blair's suggestion that this decade marked a Golden Age for the UK cultural sector. Focusing on Arts Council England, this thesis examined the ways in which the delivery of financial support and the articulation and pursuit of long-standing organisational goals was conducted and what effect these efforts had. Specifically, chapter two scrutinised the Arts Council's funding rationale, questioning the dominant conception of it as neoliberal and making the case that the Arts Council had a wider understanding of what constituted a valuable return on investment. Chapter three examined the efficacy of the organisation's policies to improve public access to the arts and attempted to draw out the reasons for possible successes and failure, ultimately suggesting that a shift in emphasis of access policies (from a focus on *who* to *how*) was necessary to better stimulate audience development. Finally, chapter four studied the shifting position of artistic excellence in the organisational agenda and the consequent frustration and debate around this issue, before using the close reading of a celebrated but challenging policy review to suggest that a change in understanding of the nature of cultural policy (and of aesthetics within that) would enable a clearer and more balanced approach to the pursuit of excellence.

These examinations were carried out through the application of an interdisciplinary analysis that was supported by primary research methods. This mixture of methodologies ensured that the secondary materials examined in each chapter were scrutinised by appropriate critical materials and that the ideas developed from this were supported by findings of case studies and interviews. This approach thus enabled the development of numerous theoretically rigorous and reflexive readings that were well grounded in real experience and, as a result, the findings of each chapter made some notable contributions to the understanding of issues in each of their identified areas of organisational operation: funding, access and excellence.

The opening study of the funding rationale of the Arts Council utilised a range of cultural economics texts to plot the global turn towards neoliberalism, establish how this manifested in the UK context and then outline the perceived effect that this had on the Arts Council funding rationale under New Labour. This chapter then deployed a range of policy documents and comments from arts makers, front-line Arts Council staff, senior Arts Council staff and government ministers to begin to challenge this dominant neoliberal perception. From here, this chapter pushed further and drew attention to the range of institutional and material factors that contrasted with this reading, including the breadth of the Arts Council's agenda, the significant increase in state expenditure and

the sincerity of language used by policy makers. Having troubled this narrative, the chapter took advantage of the space made available by Eric Shaw's application of the "varieties of capitalism" theory to propose an alternative funding rationale. It suggested that the Arts Council funding rationale can be considered as Utilitarian State Capitalist. This distinction allows for the continued recognition that the Arts Council expects a return of something for its investment but permits for this return to be more widely configured than the financial dividends of neoliberalism. Drawing on Throsby's notion of "cultural value", the case studies deployed at the close of this thesis demonstrated that the Arts Council was willing to pay for theatre companies and arts organisations that produced social, popular, aesthetic, spiritual and symbolic results

By working in this way this chapter provided a new understanding of the complexity of the organisational funding rationale in a period of explosive budget growth and heightened governmental interest. Its identification of the rationale of Utilitarian State Capitalism, particularly, offered a reasoned and well-evidenced alternative to the currently dominant neoliberal understanding. As the first articulation of this idea, the chapter also invited the continued testing of this new characterisation and offered its methodological model (the use of "varieties of capitalism" to look for different kinds of cultural value in primary case studies) as a platform for the development of future work. It did so in the hope that, over a longer period, the tendency of neoliberal interpretations of economics in the arts to dominate could be further unsettled and more nuanced understanding of the Arts Council funding rationale established. This would enable the ongoing development of better understandings of the state supported cultural sector. It also has the potential to ripple out to the state supported cultural sector itself, providing aspirant theatre companies with clear and coherent indication of what the Arts Council is willing to pay for.

The work on the Arts Council's approach to access began by positioning the organisation within the wider policy approach to improve public engagement that was adopted by the New Labour government. It then drew on a range of secondary sources to examine the impact that these efforts had. The findings discovered that despite some headline successes, the Arts Council frequently failed to meet targets relating to desired public engagement. Further, this research identified several significant issues that complicated this push to increase levels of public involvement. These included, an art/"the arts" distinction, the sizeable preference for participation in local spaces, the wide scale dis- and even anti-engagement with Arts Council supported forms and a pervasive sense of uncertainty around what the Arts Council is.

To scrutinise this material, the chapter utilised a combination of recent developments in the sociology of cultural consumption and argued that these difficulties indicate that both the Arts Council and the public can be categorised as paucivorous in their tastes, with each operating in

accordance with a different value structure; the official (long established, prominent in education, typically high cultural) and the agreeable (close to home, immediately satisfying and broadly cultural). The identification of these different value structures indicated that, contrary to Bourdieu's homology argument, there were *two* distinct capital economies operating in the UK cultural sector. This distinction was the reason why Arts Council policies struggled and the reason why, even with sustained efforts, any future work is likely to struggle also. As, simply, the Arts Council did not acknowledge a lot of what the public do whilst the public dismiss a lot of what the Arts Council offered. From this point, the chapter suggested that the better delivery of the access agenda may be achieved by an omnivorous turn by the Arts Council which would see the two cultural economies merge. The driver of this shift would be the move away from a formally and demographically focused access policy towards one that combatted processual issues. These issues were identified in the research as concerns for all groups and related to the sense that the public wanted a more formally expansive arts sector, that they would benefit from closer spatial proximity of art work, that they wanted expanded modes of engagement and that the means of communicating information about arts activities could be more varied. Having identified this issue, the chapter closed with a case study to provide an example of how this processual access policy could work.

By reaching this point, the chapter delivered a thorough reading of issues and challenges faced by the access policy in the recent past, characterised them in a new and critically rigorous way and offered a blueprint for change that contains both practical measures and a theoretically reasoned call for a perspectival shift on how the issue of access is understood from the position of policy formulation. The ultimate effect of this, more than simply unpacking the failures New Labour, is to offer a plan for change in the future that can be used to deliver significant results and higher standards of public service.

The fourth chapter opened with the introduction of the recent debate around the position of instrumental and intrinsic policy drivers in the state supported cultural sector. It went on to plot the growing frustration articulated by government ministers, Arts Council staff, leaders of artistic organisations and think tank researchers that demanded the need for change. From here, the chapter offered a three-tiered literature review. This review explored the trajectory of Arts Council policy (and the position of excellence within that) between 2000 and 2008 and offered thorough readings of some of the contemporary reflections and calls for change. It went on to outline the range of different cultural histories, cultural policy studies and policy mechanics texts that have contributed to my understanding of how policy works, from the point of formulation to implementation. In its third phase, it unpacked the mechanics of Kant's aesthetic philosophy and highlighted the secondary materials that have helped shape my understanding of his work. At this

point, Kant's idea of conditioned beauty was singled out as a useful lens through which the policies towards excellence might be read and better characterised.

Having established the interdisciplinary theoretical base for this chapter, I went on to offer a close reading and wider scrutiny of McMaster's *Supporting Excellence in the Arts*. This analysis drew out the contradictions within the text and pointed out the external challenges that hindered its, ostensible, desire to radically recentre the pursuit of artistic excellence in cultural policy. Having identified the problems of McMaster's document, the analysis developed a clear hypothesis as to why such problematic complexity exists; policy is ultimately instrumental and that this document fails to reconcile its more intrinsic aims with the mode through which it manifest, thereby pushing itself into an impossible position and undermining the legitimacy of its claims. This latter, comparative work brought to bear a Kantian vocabulary that offers a prompt for more nuanced considerations of aesthetic policy in the future. Explicitly that all aesthetic policies, whether created by the Arts Council, the UK Government or another body, must be recognised as policies of and for conditioned beauty. This would enable policy makers to move past the harmful and limiting binary of intrinsic vs instrumental notions of cultural value and enable policy makers and arts organisations to better deliver work with social and aesthetic affect.

This thesis thus provides an effective demonstration of the variety, extent and implications of the pressures on the Arts Council under New Labour and showcases how these pressures impacted the approach to organisational goals and funding procedures. By analysing these factors, each chapter presented new understandings of significant issues in studies of the Arts Council, making a series of contributions in each of the separate policy areas. Explicitly, they created a range of new characterisations that are emblematic of the nuanced and detailed reading that this work develops. The thesis thus provides articulate insights into the various competing, complimentary and contrasting value systems and ideas that shaped organisational practice in the period of study. It has showcased that whilst there were many advances in the state supported cultural sector between 1996/97 and 2007/08, it is inaccurate to describe the period as a golden age. The limited levels of public engagement and the strength of the barriers to access, the increasing frustration of artists over governmental ignorance of the inherent value of their work, and the range of expectations attached to investment all provide examples of a sector that is less than ideal.

However, just because this thesis has demonstrated that the state supported arts under New Labour was not going through a golden age, it has not shown that it was stuck in a perpetual dark age. Improvements can still be made and it is in this regard that this thesis becomes doubly valuable. In addition to the immediate contribution to the academic debate that this thesis makes, the ideas established here also offer a robust platform for the development of future work that can

have practical applications. Indeed, the concise expression of theoretically rigorous critical analysis provided by each characterisation offers researchers a language and theoretical model that can be applied and tested in other scenarios. The potential range of returns accepted under Utilitarian State Capitalism could be explored, the efficacy of a processual access policy and the possibility of its enacting could be examined further and the negotiation of the balance of the intrinsic and instrumental elements of conditioned beauty could be scrutinised. This scrutiny could be undertaken through the development of specific case studies and interviews, as begun here, or it might be conducted through larger scale quantitative and qualitative research efforts, like the public value debate conducted by the Arts Council. In either case, the value of this work is that it has the potential to stimulate the development of stronger research in the field, which could lead to improved understandings, which, in turn, lays the foundation for the formulation of better policies and, ultimately, the improved balancing and service of public, artistic and governmental interest.

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Appendix

Interview Transcript Daniel Brine, Artistic Director, Cambridge Junction
23/01/17

DB: Good afternoon, Daniel Brine speaking.

JM: Hi, is that Daniel?

DB: It is indeed

JM: Hi Daniel, this is Joe Mcloughlin, calling for our interview if it's okay?

DB: Hi there.

JM: How are you?

DB: I'm good, thanks

JM: Good, so basically to begin with, how much time do you have available today because I know you must be busy?

DB: I am busy, it's the NPO deadline. Um. How much time do you think you're gonna need?

JM: I could realistically get it done in about twenty, twenty-five minutes

DB: Okay, half an hour max sounds great.

JM: That's great, no problem. Just to give you a quick introduction about myself and get some of the ethics stuff out of the way, um, I contacted you directly through email and asked for an interview and you're happy to consent to that of your own free will, I'm not coercing you in anyway? Is that correct.

DB: [laughter] That is correct. Are you recording me?

JM: I am, yeah, that was the second one, just so you know everything we talk about today will be recorded and then some of it may make it into a draft of the thesis, at which point I'll email you a copy of that and if there's anything that you'd like changed or amended or anything like that, uh, I'll be happy to address at the time.

DB: No worries, just remind me what level you're writing at?

JM: Uh, this is for a doctoral thesis.

DB: Okay, cool.

JM: So basically, my project is looking at Arts Council funding under New Labour from 1997 to about 2008. The chapter that I'm talking to you about today is particularly about their agenda with regards to access and, kind of, getting the arts to people and some of the successes and difficulties they had in that area and then the organisations that were supported at that time in that area, if that makes sense.

DB: Yep

JM: Great stuff. So what I'd like to talk to you about today then is, if just beginning really basically, is if you can just, um, give me a quick rundown of how you would describe the Cambridge Junction and the work you do to people asking, kind've, generally.

DB: Ok, cool. Just help me understand first though, you've got that period 97-2008, do you want me to be talking about the Cambridge Junction in that period or my own personal experience because I wasn't at the junction all that time.

JM: Uh, that's fine, um, a bit of both, realistically, Junction wherever you can but if, in the meantime, you need to discuss your own experience that's not a problem

DB: Okay cool. Uh, okay, so how do I describe the Junction, so we are an arts centre that [unclear on recording] by that I mean two things, one is around interdisciplinarity, we believe that the arts are changing and that we want to reflect that in the work that we present and the relationship we have with audiences. Part of that change is an understanding that the boundaries between art and everyday life are breaking down and we're interested in what that might mean.

JM: Mm-Hm

DB: Then I would normally go on to give a whole spiel about the physicality of our building so that we're three venues, all of those sorts of things. Do you want that as well?

JM: Uh, yeah that would be great.

DB: Okay, so, the Cambridge Junction has been around for 25 years or so. We were built 25 years ago in a cattle market on the edge of town and on the other side of the train lines to the historic city and we are still the only major arts organisation outside of the historic centre. We use that being on the edge, and being built on the edge of the city, as something important to us and we talk about ourselves as an edgy venue because we're particularly engaged with contemporary practices.

JM: Yeah.

DB: We're also a venue that's committed to the up and coming. By that we mean that we're committed to youth or younger people or the young at heart, even, but also to the up and coming practices.

JM: Yeah

DB: The spaces that we have are 3 spaces. J1 takes 850 people standing and is principally used for live music. J2 is a small blackbox theatre of 220 seats and that's principally used for a theatre and dance programme but also for family theatre and a smaller popular culture programme. And then J3 which is a 100 person, basically rehearsal development space [unclear on recording]. The brand in three parts. The first part is the popular culture programme, which is live music, comedy and club. That's the bulk of our programme and we're also a social enterprise so that's where we earn a lot of our money. Being a social enterprise means that we earn over 50% of our income and reinvest it back into our charitable activities. The second part is the arts programme and the third part is Creative Learning and we talk about the programme as the intersection of those three parts. If you draw a very basic ven diagram with popular culture, art and creative learning, that's how we talk about our organisation, we're structured around that. But we're particularly interested about the meeting of the three parts.

JM: Mm-Hm

DB: Where popular culture, art and creative learning come together, we see as a rich area for investigation and when we are working on special projects we'll often try and make sure they fall within that intersection area.

JM: Yeah. Great stuff. SO, with that in mind, it matched up with a lot of stuff that I've looked up on your website and, kind of, brochures that I've looked into and bits and pieces around that, um, it seems to me anyway that it's quite a holistic approach to access. So that you don't take the word to mean "we'll just programme a really wide variety of shows, you take it to mean "we'll try and draw in as many different people in as many different ways as we can".

DB: Yeah. The challenge is to articulate something and the challenge is to then really do it. I mean I don't know if you picked up that our organisation went through a period of [unclear on recording, likely consolidation/merger] about five years ago.

JM: Yeah

DB: And that was actually when I joined the organisation. One of the things that we had at that point was, you know, just almost silos. So, we were doing the arts as one separate thing, popular culture as another, learning as another.

JM: Yes.

DB: So this idea of bringing them all together and having them intersecting and, as you say, being holistic, we talk about the whole organisation, it's a great way to talk about it but it's also partially aspirational, if we're honest. If we look at the popular culture programme, it's still by far the largest in terms of audience and, uh, money that goes through the organisation so it still dominates. But we like to think that the three parts, at some point in our future, will be equal.

JM: Yes. So picking up on that, um, popular culture issue. A lot of the secondary research I've done around public taste and public consumption patterns, um, there's a very, very significant, majority almost, of the public who have great difficulty with what they brand "the arts" in inverted commas, whether that's around not feeling particularly comfortable, whether that's around not understanding it, issues like that. And in fact, people in interviews and reviews that I've read often talk about how they would rather sit in and watch tv or go to the pub or something like that. So, is it the case at the moment, then, that you feel popular culture is a way of drawing people in and then getting them to experiment with something else or.....

DB: We, in terms of our marketing we talk about three approaches, one is to encourage people who are local to us.

JM: Yep.

DB: One is to encourage people who repeat, so who come to something, we try to get them to come back. And the third, we talk about it as being crossover. So, we're particularly interested in someone who might come to a music gig that we can then encourage to come to a dance show.

JM: Yeah.

DM: That's absolutely something that we think is possible. To be honest, though, it's extremely, extremely difficult. Um, audiences are very set in their approach and in their ways and what they think they're going to enjoy.

JM: Yes

DB: Um, so it's quite a hard challenge.

JM: So, anecdotally then, without recourse to any evidence, just off the top of your head, you'd say that getting, engaging the public consistently and reaching new audience members is, even with a lot of effort, still proving quite difficult?

DB: [laughter] Anecdotally, yes.

JM: Yep

DB: Yeah, y'know, I... I.... I think things are changing, you need to look at, again, especially if you're talking about Arts Council, I think to look at us as a case study in terms of the way the Arts Council engages with programmes, it's interesting. I was writing the first business plan for the Arts Council six years ago, or five years ago, um, the Arts Council had only just begun with organisations like ours to talk about the whole programme.

JM: Yeah

DB: Before that, we would only ever apply to the Arts Council for our arts programme.

JM: Yeah, because there'd be separate departments, budgets.

DB: It's only in the last five years the Arts Council has encouraged us to think about the whole programme. So, they themselves are obviously changing about how they perceive arts organisations. And this is an important.... Part of this is partially about the commerce of it, that there's no way that we can survive without the commercial arm. So the Arts Council may as well embrace that and I think in doing so, um, are acknowledging that there are a whole range of practices which might not have traditionally been called art but which need supporting in some way because they are cultural activities.

JM: Yeah, and I think that, definitely in their literature, although they're getting better at it, or more expansive anyway, in the period I'm looking at there are still some quite stark dividing lines, um, between I suppose what you'd define as art and, uh, what you'd define as entertainment. Um, and I suppose the reason that I'm very interested in your organisation is that you seem to be, um, troubling those a bit and crossing those lines intentionally.

DB: Sure.

JM: Just thinking a little more then about the challenges of access, how would you, say if you've got a show, or you've got a season going and it's not going as well as you might have hoped or you might have thought judging by the quality of the project, um, how would you address those access issues in the short term and the long term do you think? Whether it's a case of press campaigns or whether it's a case of alternative programming in the future.

DB: So you're saying if something's not selling how do we go about looking at that?

JM: Yes, yeah, whether selling or just generally, kind've, getting your message out.

DB: Okay, cool. The... The answer is insanely complicated.

JM: Okay.

DB: [laughter] That audiences don't come for one reason.

JM: Yep

DB: That lots of people come for different reasons.

JM: Yep

DB: So we know, for instance, with the popular culture programme that it is largely act driven, that people will come to see certain bands because they want to see the band.

JM: Yep.

DB: The thing that you aim for is that people are loyal to your venue and not to the band or to the comedians. But the honest truth is that most people are interested in the comedian or the band and not the venue. So, um, so with popular culture, if people don't like the name you're not going to sell it. It's that simple. Y'know, the act's either got a name or it hasn't. In the arts it's slightly different because people aren't necessarily looking for something they'd know, they're looking for an experience or, um, to.... to.... to do, or they're engaging in a different way. So with that you can talk about the experience or what they might... How it might be something that they could experience in a different way. What they might learn or what they might think. You can talk about those sorts of things. Um and so we market that in a different way. But, essentially, what we have to do to get people in that sense is get people to trust you so you need to find a group of people who are interested in, um, let's say contemporary dance, and you need to be able to tell them you're going to enjoy this because it's physical or because it's good music. You have to know what they're interested in with that particular show.

JM: Yeah

DB: Does that make sense with what you're after?

JM: It does, yeah. So with that, basically, I'm just, to kind of put it into how I'm looking at it, this perspective at the moment, uh, places like the Royal Opera House or the National Theatre, just taking really big, obvious examples, um, they have recourse to classics, like big re-inventions or redos of, whether it's like Swan Lake or anything like that sort of stuff, um, so what I was thinking about in terms of programming choices was about how do you maintain a relationship or how do you encourage a relationship with new work and with up and coming work and how do you, how do you get that out there? How do you increase access, basically?

DB: If it was ideal, if there was an ideal world then I would be saying that I would be engaging audiences in the process of making work, not the product. That I'd be getting the audiences interested in how the artists work, how the artists think rather than just thinking I'm going to see a show.

JM: Yep

DB: And that would be a way that we could redefine our organisation, if we could, to get people engaged in it. So, for instance, we do 26 weeks of residencies in a year. We could be getting people to come along to those residencies in the early stages to talk to the artists *and then* be interested in coming back to the show. I think that this is where the challenge for the arts is, to get people engaged in that whole process. The trouble is, the model is about selling tickets often and you have to sell tickets so you have to sell tickets then you really need the show, but there's a whole range of stuff that you, you can't do, because of the economics of it.

JM: Yep, absolutely. So.... So, within the range that it's possible, then, would you say that the three, the kind of, three strand approach that you're undertaking now as an organisation, is part of that getting involved in the process?

DB: Absolutely, I mean, it's working for us because we can talk about the individual parts and the parts where they fit, where there are commonalities, basically.

JM: Yep.

DB: But it's not going to work for everybody but it'll work for us and that's partially because we're an arts centre as well, so the programme is very, very broad.

JM: Yes, yeah, I think that's the, um, I think as a multi-sort of-form venue, there must be certain advantages, as I understand it anyway, in terms of the range of things you can do and the range of people you can appeal to

DB: Absolutely, advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are you can do a range of stuff. The disadvantages are all people think you're going to be something for everybody and that is a particular problem with, say, the city council, city councils tend to be more conservative or more socially orientated and they don't understand that you're not a community centre, you're an arts centre. Um, but it also means that you're a jack of all trade, and that sometimes means you're a master of none.

JM: Mm-Hm

DB: And in the arts, being a master of something is very important so, we... we're not... while I think we're a very good arts centre, we're not an elite organisation in that sense because the elite organisations will almost always be the single art form organisations.

JM: Because they can specialise

DB: Because they specialise. Yep, and that means.... The Arts Council funding is given for different reasons for different organisations. Our money will be given because we're an important part of infrastructure in Cambridge, an organisation like METTLE will get their money because they're an elite organisation offering art at a certain kind of engagement.

JM: Yep

DB: And so, it's important, that you have to look at each organisation and say well what is it that the Arts Council in particular are valuing about them. It's not always the same answer.

JM: No, no. So, with that in mind then, and, kind of, thinking about your role and your value as an organisation how, um, would you expect your programming choices and your formal choices to change in the future, sort of thinking about where they were, say, 10 years ago to where they might be in another 5 years?

DB: Sure, uh, this, this. The answer to this is a lot to do with local context as well. So, Cambridge is thriving. It's a.... It's a interesting city at the moment because it's going through a big period of growth. The growth is linked to the technology and innovation centres. Uh, if I had to think about what we're doing in the future I have to think about how we engage with local audiences, the local audience is changing. So we have to think about how we fit within that change in Cambridge so we're probably going to be looking at technology more as something that we, as tools for us to use because, partially because there's a growing population in Cambridge who are interested in that sort of thing. Um, if I'm looking at the future as well, I'm also seeing politically, uh, younger people who are disenfranchised or who don't feel the world is for them or can't find a place within it and I think we have a role to, um, let youth lead. So the question about what we do in the future is that maybe we open up our doors to young people in different ways, to help them find their voices and help them lead. And the third bit in Cambridge in particular, which is again around growth, I think there's questions around place-making which are super important and this isn't only place making as in the physical thing changing Cambridge but it's about what sort of society we want and how we can build it. And that could be anything in Cambridge. We could be the first cycling-only city in the country.

JM: Yes

DB: Or we could become a city that, you know, has no young people on free school meals. Somehow we eradicate that in the city. There are big social questions that at the moment the city's not really grappling with but if we do our job we will engage with those questions over the next five to ten years to get people to think about.

JM: Great stuff. So, kind of, just to tie all that together then, your understanding of your job as an arts centre, or your position as an arts centre, in relation to access and public engagement is kind of inextricably bound up with social questions and social issues.

DB: I think it has to be

JM: Then also opening up the aesthetic side of art in more ways to more people, getting involved in the production process.

DB: Yeah

JM: And then, finally, kind of, um, also reflecting back a more popular culture as opposed to being formally conservative.

DB: I think we have to ask ourselves what culture is and if people are interested in popular music then why not put it on the stages?

JM: Yeah, um, great stuff. That's an awful lot to be going on with, thank you ever so much.

DB: Are we done? Can I just tell you a few things that you should look up.

JM: Yeah, certainly.

DB: Okay, so I was a funding officer in 1997 and the question of commercial..... commerciality..... commercial businesses in the arts is a really, is an interesting question. In the early 90s some of the first people to be asking that question were organisations who were either doing festivals or clubs and I think if you were to look at Duckie, for instance, do you know Duckie?

JM: Yes, yeah, yeah.

DB: Okay, so Duckie's a really good model. So I was funding officer when Duckie got its first grant

JM: Mm-Hm

DB: And the, there, internally, there was a degree of opposition to it because Duckie was seen as a commercial organisation

JM: Yes.

DB: But actually, Duckie proved that they have certain skills which the arts needed and have gone on to do amazing stuff. So I think the..... um..... It raises for me really interesting questions about what sort of commercial businesses you can draw on within the arts and make them successful in the arts and I think the Arts Council is grappling with the same questions in technology at the moment.

JM: Yes

DB: SO.... Which part of the tech business to they engage with to make sense of the arts and which part is just left to business? I think that's super important. The other thing is just, I mean its, the frustration with, say, the National or the Royal Opera House, um, the response that, that people will give it this response about the *need* to have specialists. The need to have specialists. Or the people who are the national leaders.

JM: Yeah.

DB: And I think it's..... I don't think it's as simple as, um, "oh we need to move the money away from them to somewhere else" and I also don't think it's as simple as "oh we should ask those organisations to change to be more like the other one". I think it's a real interesting challenge about how you make that change happen. I think the change needs to happen

JM: Yeah

DB: But how you make it happen, where the power lies for that is super important. Because I think what.... If you say to the National, if you say to the Opera House, for instance, "well, we need you to engage with more popular forms of music because we think that's what society wants" then they will try to do that but actually, if that's the solution you want, why don't you just give the money..... There are probably other people who could do it better.

JM: Yes.

DB: But you still want the elite organisation so it's a very, very difficult divide about.... To know how it's going to pan out, basically.

JM: Yes, so, so is it the case then that you, if you were in the hotseat making decisions, are you kind of talking about, um, like a push for a more French or more Scottish approach to a National Theatre where, say, the brand exists but it is slightly different in each of the cities.

DB: I think, I think, no, of course I don't know what the solution is in the UK. The other person, have you spoke to David Micklem

JM: No.

DB: Have you come across the project 65 million people, or something, I think it's called [64 Million Artists]

JM: Uh, no, not yet

DB: Let me just see if that's what its called. David Micklem is an ex-Arts Council officer.

JM: Yep

DB: And he's getting a lot of traction at the moment with the 65 million people thing which basically says that everyone should have a chance to do art and it appears to be coming more influential in terms of..... Um.... So it's not only about everyone gets the chance to experience art, what he's basically saying is that everyone should have the chance to be an artist.

JM: Yeah

DB: And this is a shift which I think the Arts Council is looking at. I think its quite interesting, although its beyond your period, I think it's grown out of those Labour years.

JM: Well, there was um, just from my own stuff so far there's a definite, amongst the public anyway, there's a more comfortable leaning towards participation in the home or participation at an amateur level.

DB: Yep

JM: Versus, um, going to see things professionally.

DB: Absolutely, so this is, um, I think what, I've just found it on the internet, it's 64millionartists.com. I think that's what they're interested in and they're getting a bit of traction in it at the moment.

JM: Yep, not to worry.

DB: So it might be worth looking at them.

JM: Great stuff. Alrighty, thank you for your time, that was lovely, as I say once I've got it written up I'll send you a transcript and then later on a draft of the finished chapter and if you have any amendments or changes that you'd like to be made let me know.

DB: Okay, cheers.

JM: Thank you ever so much

DB: Okay, bye.

JM: Cheers now, bye bye.

Interview Transcript Stephen Johnstone, Artistic Director, Black Country Touring (with recent funding information)

15/02/17

SJ: [garbled introductory, background noises, poor Skype connection] How long do you need?

JM: So, the last one took about half an hour but it really depends on, kind of, um, how much you're willing to, not willing to talk about but kind of, just naturally, how the conversation goes. If that makes sense?

SJ: Yeah, absolutely.

JM: Cool, so just as a matter of ethics, to let you know I am recording this today. The transcript will make it into the thesis but before it does I'm happy to send you a copy of it and if you want anything edited or amended or changed just feel free to ask that. That's not a problem. And then the other issue of course is just that you're doing this of your own free will, that I approached you via email and you agreed on your own terms. I'm not holding a gun to your head or anything

SJ: Oh no, absolutely

JM: Great stuff, so the way it's worked previously is generally, I sort of, um, I'll explain a bit more about myself and the project and then, um, if you want to do the same for yourself and then the conversation tends to evolve fairly naturally from there.

SJ: Yeah

JM: There are a few things that I'd like to talk about specifically but we'll get to them later. But generally, don't worry about, if we get to them and you're kind of unsure or unclear, like you were saying with your dates, don't worry about flapping around for answers. I'm just trying to get a sense of how you and the organisation works.

SJ: Yeah.

JM: Does that make sense?

SJ: That's fine. Even as we speak I'm [inaudible due to bad connection] looking around for a date order.

JM: So, a little about myself then, the PhD project developed out of my MA which was looking at the first four years of New Labour and has really just expanded from there to look at the first ten years. Looking particularly at, are you still there? [bad connection]

SJ: Yeah, yeah.

JM: Just looking particularly at how they threw a lot of money at the arts and culture, generally, but as part of that asked a lot of the arts and culture, with particular regard to this socially inclusive mission that ticked a lot of boxes that the Arts Council described as "priority groups", being ethnic minorities, disabled groups, those sorts of things. And really what I'm doing is talking to theatre companies and venues to see how, if at all, they felt that pressure or how they responded to that

pressure. And as I've said before it might be that you in no way felt it, um, but say it just happened in parallel or it might be that you're directly responding to things. Does that make sense?

SJ: Yeah it does, it does yeah. Can you hear me, am I all ok to you?

JM: Yeah, there's a bit of a crackle but it's all coming through fine.

SJ: Right, that's fine then, I don't ever think that we as an organisation were ever particularly aware of the kind of things that you talked about as pressure possibly because of why we were set up and what we were set up to do, originally. If you go right back to where Black Country Touring started.

JM: Yeah, that's 1997, is it?

SJ: Yeah. It was set up originally as a kind of, um. There used to be a theatre company that operated around the black country, that toured round and did work in local community centres and, it was a community based theatre company and, for whatever reason, the funding was withdrawn from that prior to Black Country Touring being set up and the Local Authorities still had some money that they wanted to invest in the arts and Arts Council were interested in maintaining that relationship.

JM: yeah

SJ: But rather than paying for a theatre company to produce work, they thought a better use of their time, uh, *their money*, was to emulate what was developing in the rural arts scene at that time- which was for a touring scheme to be set up that could make connections into the local community and get them to promote work or use them, so, working on an arts centre model without a building if you know what I mean?

JM: Yep

SJ: So, programming work for things. We were set up to do that and I have to say that when I first joined, I came to Black Country Touring in 1999, um, and I came in, it was then running two seasons of work a year, it had one-part time post that was two or three days a week and it had another part time post which was about two days a month. They, they basically put together, there was a programmer and a director, and they put together a programme of touring work that was available, quite limited, and then tried to get local community centres, schools etc.... to buy that work

JM: Yeah

SJ: The intention was that local people would get to see it, so it was set up with the intention [social access]. Whether that was because of the thing you're talking about, that pressure from central government, to do that or not, it was set up with that in mind. So right from the beginning that was the intention.

JM: Yep

SJ: And I'd just come out of working for a theatre company called Pentabus who are a new writing company who worked in rural locations and we had a very strong following in local communities, in local village halls, all the rest of it. So, in my head, I thought it was a fairly straight swap from the work I had been doing, which was making work for local people touring work to local people, to this

notion of doing a part time job, occasionally job sharing that with Frances (who I still job share it with) and continuing my own career as a theatre director whilst doing this local delivery in an area that I live. So, it seemed quite, it seemed like an actual thing. But the interesting thing was, as soon as I got here, it now seems obvious to me but didn't seem so obvious at the time, when you go to a rural area, you go and put on a show and, actually, if the village hall committee knows about it, they tell everybody in the village, everybody in the village tells all their mates and it's a *geographically located* thing and people turn up. The people who are interested. Because, a. they get to know about it better and b. there's not much else going on. As soon as you work in urban locations, that all alters.

JM: Yes

SJ: The community centres don't have those networks, even the good ones don't have those kinds of networks. They don't work like that. We started a thing called Young Promoters because we were doing things in school and lots of school kids were basically.... We were working through schools because they were the places that had spaces that you could use. They had school halls. Some of them were equipped, some weren't, but you basically had the infrastructure you could use in deprived local environments. But when we got there, they'd [the shows] been programmed by the English teacher and there was no real connection out from the school. It stayed within the school community. So actually, the audience, even if it was an appropriate audience, tended to be the last group of kids that that teacher had been working with. They'd basically gone, "you'd better come along tonight", you know, "get it". I know it's not that crude but you know what I mean.

JM: Yep

SJ: And we decided it wasn't a very effective way of working because they were getting inappropriate work, not inappropriate in the sense there was anything wrong with it, just not necessarily the kind of work they want.

JM: Just disconnected, yeah.

SJ: So, we thought, let's set up this thing called Young Promoters and we'll get the teachers to work with a group of kids to decide what they want to see and what they think their peers will want to see, we'll book that work in in, still after school, same as it was and they'll get an audience for it.

JM: Yeah. Whenabouts was that, roughly?

SJ: 1999-2000, and we got some money from the Millennium Festival and that was actually a really big kick start for the company for doing work like this, because it's, it is ferociously difficult in an urban environment to network to people. It sounds counter intuitive really, you're in the middle of the city talking to people all the time. But what we found was, when we started doing the young promoters, *a* they didn't just want to work to their peer group, in fact most of them said "I'd like my family and friends to come and see something, rather than just everybody else [at school]" so would it be possible, why don't we programme family friendly work or work that's open to everybody. And all of a sudden, we went from having the third-year English kids to actually having the local community coming in to see shows. And that was like a revelation to me, I would say, because I suddenly realised that what you were operating with in urban environments was demographics not geographics. That, if you could work across demographic groups you're more likely to make wider

connections and bring people in. So, that then led to a whole series, way of thinking about how you use the arts in urban environments and who you might want to work with, who the people are who you might want to work with. So we, we started doing work, a lot of people were interested in diverse work, a lot of the people we were connecting with, connecting with African-Caribbean Associations and various other groups who would be saying “what work is there available”? And we would have to say there is very little you know because.... Of what always happens..... The work’s there but the work gets concentrated.

JM: Yeah

SJ: Where it’s the least, for companies who are setting up, it’s where it’s the least, um, it’s the most cost effective place to do it. Its where it’s the least intensive on their time. If you’re setting up a new company, you know if you’re 3 young black actors and you want to set up a new company, you don’t want to have to acquire a van, touring kit, you know, all that kind of stuff. You try and get yourself associated to a building or go into existing arts infrastructure. You don’t want to have to start touring communities because it’s too hard, you need to take everything with you. So, then, we approached Arts Council and said can we.... At that point, the equivalent of NPOs could apply for additional money to do additional work, so we then started applying for additional money to commission and/or work with diverse companies either to make site-specific work or to create work that could tour to our kinds of venues.

JM: Yeah

SJ: But it was an interesting thing that, one of the things we’d also discovered with Young Promoters is, you *cannot* tell people what to book. You can lead the horse to water but you cant..... What we found worked.... So, of the two things that we developed when we were working with diverse companies, if we commissioned them to create a bespoke piece of work that would fit, we struggled to get people to book it. I know that sounds odd, given what I’ve just said about people not having the stuff to book, but it’s that thing of people saying “yes I want work that suits my community, but don’t like the look of that”. Which is fair enough. At the same time, we also found that when we did site-specific work, like work in galleries, we did two or three projects on the bounce where we went and worked in art galleries and we out dance artists, or musicians or performance poets into art galleries interpreting work, some of which was from diverse artists, some of it wasn’t. That actually got really interesting responses from people because you got people who would turn up because it was a new and interesting thing, people who were just going to the gallery (some of whom were like to ignore it and some of whom really enjoyed it). So, we all of a sudden found ourselves experimenting with form and content and with the way of producing work to draw in communities in different ways.

JM: Yeah

SJ: So, we’d already started working with/to younger audiences, younger communities with the Young Promoters. We’d started doing the work with the more diverse audiences and promoters and then there was a local organisation called Sandwell Asian Arts (I think it was at the time) who were running on Arts Council Grants for the Arts or the equivalent of at the time, I can’t remember what they were called then.

JM: Yeah, just the small project money, that sort of thing.

SJ: And they were coming to the end of the second two year lot of funding, so they'd been in existence for four years, but they'd always struggled to maintain themselves and maintain, a kind of, output of work and when they were being wound up, the consultancy was, well they weren't quite being wound up at that point but they were wondering what the continuation of their work was going to be, their consultant came and talked to us because we were local, working in the area and they looked at the work we were doing and they said a better way of going forward, rather than having two arts organisations, it would be if you could amalgamate these organisations, bring the function of Sandwell Asian Arts to Black Country Touring and maintain the work that way.

JM: Yeah.

SJ: Which is what we did, we brought in their producer to work with us and we still have a South Asian producer who works with us and we still have a strong focus on South Asian work because of that. So, we went from never producing our own work to now having a mixed bag of creating bespoke work which is generally site specific, which generally has a very diverse character in terms of the stories and the work that's created. And we still have a very diverse group of people who are the promoters and a lot of that diversity comes from working through schools and Young Promoters.

JM: Yeah

SJ: Because, in an area like this they are inevitably diverse, so I think when we looked at stats for them last year, I think something like 63% of them are from BME backgrounds of one form or another. And also, I think 40 odd percent, 45 percent come from the 30% most deprived areas in the country [additional research by Johnstone revealed that the proportion is actually larger, at 58%], that's deprived both economically and in skills and education.

JM: Yeah

SJ: So, a lot of the work we're doing, inevitably has become crystallised around those areas and I think we have been served by that government agenda, in that we've been swimming the same direction.

JM: Yeah, like it's not like a conscious, it's not like a trickle down, it's just that you're going in the same, the same way.

SJ: Yeah

JM: Yeah

SJ: And so that's really suited us and actually, sometimes, it's very frustrating when you kind of, because increasingly Arts Council are pushing organisations to change and become more diverse and more outward focused actually, what they tend to do is overlook the companies who are doing that work already and press on to the major, like round here it would be Birmingham Rep or people like that. Birmingham Rep who are also, to be honest, quite active in creating diverse work and see it as an integral part of what they do really.

JM: Yeah. So, um, thinking about that then, looking at the range of work you've got on your website, they go back to about 2006. There's not much before that but I presume that's just because of digitalisation kicking up in the mid-noughties.

SJ: Yes. I think that's probably true. I'm trying to remember when we first started.... We did a whole series of work called *Resonate* which was the first South Asian stuff when we started doing that and that is on the website somewhere as *Resonate*. I think there is a resonate thing and that would be when it first started being properly documented because prior to that, you're right, I mean there's photographs but they're in a drawer somewhere.

JM: Yeah, that's fine. I suppose what I was getting at is that from the stuff I've seen, there seems to be a fairly clear trend towards making work out of public experience

SJ: Yes

JM: And not to use the term disparagingly but it's a very kind of amateur approach, in the sense that you're involving people in the process rather than dropping a fully formed show on them. Does that make sense?

SJ: Yes

JM: And I don't mean that as a bad word....

SJ: No, no, no

JM: I just mean it as a distinction from, um, because basically what I'm curious about is that the main thing I've found from secondary research and crunching data and talking to members of the public is that people have a general desire to do more art.

SJ: Yeah

JM: If you talk to them they say "ooh, I'd like to do that", particularly if you talk to them about their kids. They say we'd like to get our kids involved because, for whatever reason, the arts are always perceived as good or advantageous to have. But on the same side, to a large degree, and it varies by demographics more or less, but even in the most affluent white areas there is still a significant chunk of people who say "the arts aren't for me, I don't like them, I'd rather go home and watch Netflix or go to the pub, or something like that".

SJ: Yeah

JM: So what I find fascinating about your work is that you've been very successful at taking that one urge, that first one about getting involved, and actually folding it into the kinds of work that people often find themselves distant from or threatening. Not threatening, but you know what I mean, like theatre and dance and those kinds of things. So, I'm just wondering. Obviously, it's a conscious choice but was it a conscious choice to overcome formal barriers or was it a basic way of saying we'd like to engage with the community and here's how we're doing it?

SJ: I suppose both, for me, are sort of the same thing because we, we know..... Going back to Young Promoters which was like, it was a major eye opener in terms of how, when you entrust people with work, with a job to do they will do it. It doesn't matter how young they are. Now, our Young Promoters are principally in junior schools.

JM: Hmmm.

SJ: So they started off in secondary and they slipped down, partly because the curriculum involvement is easier at that age but also because they can do it and those are much more localised in the things But as soon as you entrust them with the work, as long as it's clear what's expected and what's needed, they'll do it. And we also, when we started doing things like research, we wanted the work we were creating to be reflective of the communities of the Black Country.

JM: Yeah

SJ: But not be..... When we started with Sandwell Asian Arts incorporating, coming into us and doing the *Resonate* programme, we were clear that what we didn't want to be was a cultural organisation for South Asian people. IN the sense of, we didn't want to put on Kathak dance and Bhangra and all sorts of things. Those *could be* part of what we do but we wanted to be reflective of the lived experience of people.

JM: Yeah

SJ: Now, to be reflective of that we had to find ways of collecting and one of the very first projects we did was called *Apna-Gur (Our Home)* and we wanted.... I was aware from my background doing other work that quite often if you go and you interview.... If you go out as the interviewer and interview people, they will tell you what they think you want to hear and what they think fits with your agenda.

JM: Yeah

SJ: If you put two friends in a room or friends and family, they will start from where you are but they will begin to diverge, just naturally, because they do, it's like the Listen project on Radio 4, you get people sitting together and they'll have a conversation and almost inevitably the conversations can be much more interesting than the questioning that would happen if you were doing it.

JM: Yeah

SJ: IT's just terrifying as the people who are going to form that into something because you do not know what you're going to get back. So, once we got over the fear of that.... I mean, when we did *Apna Ghar*, we kind of, there were things that came back that we definitely would not have got. There was one woman who gave a very long story. *Apna-Gur* means our home and she talked about her experience of domestic abuse in the South Asian community, so what her home became for her. And it was a really, it was a beautiful story in story terms, and a harrowing story, but she, she started off and she was being beaten by her husband very badly and her dad's answer to it was to go and put a bolt on her bedroom door. It wasn't to say come away from there, don't stick with this and eventually she left her husband because of the level of abuse and then was rejected by her parents, rejected by the community. We've all heard these stories. Then she, because of who she was, her

mum then had a stroke, and she went, she was the only member of her family who went and nursed her back to health.

JM: Hmmm

SJ: Despite everything that had happened to her, but there's something very.... She became a very independent, she did that because of her independence almost not because of her subservience and we realised that nobody.... We would have heard a bit of that story and we'd have heard a very sketchy version of that story but the depth of the story we got was really important. And then there was somebody else who told us about the problems that they'd had when their mother was having mental health problems.

JM: Hm.

SJ: And again, they're the kind of stories that they would share with their friends because their friends already knew about it, to a degree, and they could start to pick at them, pick away at them, and they knew who to talk to, who to go and talk to. So that, for us, revealed a whole host of things. I mean that happened at all sorts of levels of that project and we realised that by removing ourselves from the gathering process we would get more interesting and different stories but it also was that thing that you were saying that those people then become advocates for the show.

JM: Yes

SJ: They then want to come and see it, they then want to bring the people whose stories they've gathered to come and see it, they want to tell their friends about it and if you serve them well they then become advocates for the company. They feel like they've been given a voice and that you are a kind of honest broker in the whole thing, they have different relationship with the arts after that because they see it as about them and not divorced. Now, that doesn't carry on forever because those people then, eventually, unless you can re-engage and re-engage and re-engaged they'll disappear over the hill and maybe re-engage with you at a later date.

JM: Yeah

SJ: But it's a permanent process for us, I think, of engagement. We did.... The Corner shop one was a really interesting project because we did that because we wanted something, after doing projects like *Apna Ghar* and a couple of other projects, we wanted to do something that engaged all the different communities of the black country, not just South Asian communities. And we knew the corner shops were that first visible presence quite often of communities and that was when the Polish community was just starting to arrive and, you know, I'm sitting here now, looking out this window and I can see three Polish shops from where I'm sitting but then, when we did it, I think there were two in the locality that we knew about, that were serving almost everybody in the area. When I say locality, I mean the black country rather than West Bromwich.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SJ: So it's kind of.... It was a great way of connecting in those people as well and it doesn't, it's not like, I think one of the weird things about Arts Council approach and the government's approach is

they sort of believe that once..... It's like catching fish.... They think once you've caught them you can whack them in a net and they'll never go away again.

JM: Yeah

SJ: Whereas actually, it's completely the opposite. It's like those fishing lakes, you might catch the fish but then you throw it back and it may come back and it may not, you know, it's out there somewhere.

JM: So with that, you said engagement is a permanent process, which I think is a very astute and concise way of describing it, so there was something, um, almost ridiculous in that all of the reviews of the Arts Council between about 2006 and 2008 they put percentages on BME groups and disabled groups and young people without, seemingly, any acknowledgement that BME itself is a varied category, disability is a varied category. They just want 3% of those kinds of people, of those kinds of people, of those kinds of people and they found fairly uniformly, apart from in a couple of instances, that they failed to do that. Their body of work failed to engage with people at the levels that were required, even when those levels weren't that big, if you think of a 3% jump it's not huge.

SJ: Yeah, yeah.

JM: And so I wonder then as part of this idea of engagement as a permanent process, is it the case that we need to have, if we're looking to engage and get more people into the arts more regularly, is it the case that can't just say, at a very basic level. Let's make black shows for black people and let's make Asian shows for Asian people and just fill the quotas, almost because, because that's almost too fixed....

SJ: Yeah. It's too rigid and doesn't really meet what is needed. We clearly need a more diverse pool of artists and a more diverse range of companies. We clearly need that because they're not reflective. At the moment we're, *Life's a Beach* is our next project, we're looking to recruit people in to do that. We will struggle to get diverse artists at a stage in their career where they're developed enough to do the kind of work we want them to do and yet are willing to spend their time towing caravans around and, you know, presenting work in caravans because it's hard work and different and difficult. And particularly, if they're good they will get fairly steady work now in other areas, you know, I don't mean on television and things but more theatres are looking to diversify their casts and all the rest of it. We've been going long enough now that we get people who come up who say, um, "I was a Young Promoter". There's a guy downstairs in the arts organisation, Jerrel, he's doing really well. He was a Young Promoter with one of our cohorts of Young Promoters years ago. We were part of his journey, I like to think an important part, he says an important part but that's because of who he is as well.

JM: Yep

SJ: For all the Jerrels there are the dozens and dozens of others who go on and may or may not engage with the arts again. And certainly, in terms of the parents loyalty.... So, like, last year 40% of our audiences came from non-white British backgrounds, the percentages of them, you know I'm quite an advocate of looking at your statistics, when I talk to Arts Council I want to know that I can tell them that we are doing the job that they want people to be doing because that advocacy is important because we're a small organisation and, you know, if we disappear nobody is really going

to notice. We're a small organisation in the black country. If Birmingham Rep disappears there's a big empty building to remind everyone where it was. We can disappear easily and I'm not suggesting that Arts Council want us to disappear but it's important for us to say that this is the kind of job that we are doing and that this is the kind of job that can be done by engaging in the right ways.

JM: Yeah

SJ: That 40% of our audience that are from non-white British backgrounds, there's also, there'll be a massive percentage from the white British backgrounds that will be from lower socio-economic groups as well because of the areas we work in, but it's because of the way we work, because of Young Promoters. If we go and do, you know, Natalie will programme 15 Young Promoters shows across the year, those kids will be from those backgrounds, they will bring in their parents and their families and their friend and they'll be from those backgrounds and that's why they're coming to see the shows and the shows they will book, some of those will be, you know, diverse shows, however you want to classify that. Do you know what I mean?

JM: yeah

SJ: But the real reason the parents are coming is because the kids are involved. I know that the parents get a lot out of it, their satisfaction ratings, they don't come and see it and go satisfactory, satisfactory. They all think the shows are excellent. But I also know that the reason they think the shows are excellent is that, people who are more theatre literate might come and see the shows and go "that's quite a simplistic show" but because they do not know what to expect and because it's their first experience and the experiences are good (I'm not saying they're bad shows), but it's..... I said this once to Arts Council and they didn't quite get it. I said, "when we start getting our satisfaction ratings going down a bit, I think I'll believe that we've got more of a permanent audience that understands what's going on". We get very high satisfaction ratings because we get audiences who are not theatre literate, who are not dance literate so as long as the shows are accessible and they have impact, which they do, they wow people because they're not used to it and that's great. It's brilliant. But it's not because all the shows are brilliant, it's because they're having that new experience. And I think, you know, I constantly do it myself as an artist. My world view is based on that. I do not consider myself a social worker is what I'm saying, I suppose. I consider myself an artist. I believe that the fundamental crucible for the arts at the moment has to be in community with, you know, how we make our connections with community. I think things like Brexit, the Trump phenomenon all prove that. If communities can't get together and speak and talk to each other, even about trivia, they can't speak. So we need to be doing the arts where we're doing it. The art is crucial because art, for me, art is about opening people's minds

JM: Yes

SJ: It's about opening you up to the sense of possibility, the imagination, what you can do. That has to work for people where they are. It's not enough to have conceptual art dropped into places because conceptual art has been evolved over years by people who are all part of that thinking. It needs to be communicating art. I mean there are brilliant bits that are effectively conceptual art, like, if you think about *The Angel of the North*.

JM: Yeah

SJ: For me, that is a wonderful piece of great art because it's not an angel, it doesn't look like an angel, it's got aeroplane wings on it, when you stand next to it you see the moulded seams that have been made in shipyards. It's got presence. But because of the way its presented and thought through it holds ideas of angelic protection somehow. Those massive wings do look like they're enfolding in some strange way. Its built by local people, built by local industry. It has a kind of resonance and depth in that place which, if you stuck it somewhere else, if it was in the middle of Hyde Park wouldn't be the same. So, it fulfils art in that it speaks to the local people, is monumental and speaks to the people who just drive by it, it has a lot going for it and its abstracted in a way that forced people to think and imagine.

JM: Hm.

SJ: I can't even remember where I started on that. But I do think that.... Our job is to create imagination for people

JM: Yeah. So, if it's not artists as social workers, then, it's just the fact that art has an inherent social function?

SJ: Yes. Exactly. And the social function has always been there. It is.... Our social duty is.... I've got a friend who works in prisons with offenders and she said, she was telling me one day about the work she was doing and she was saying that she spoke to one man who was a serial offender, very violent offender, and she asked him to imagine what he might be doing ten years hence. And he said "I don't know what you mean". She said "imagine what your life might be like". And he said "I don't know what you mean, I don't get the concept". He couldn't imagine, it was one of his problems. He couldn't imagine change for himself. He couldn't imagine how his life might change because he, really, has no imagination, do you know what I mean? He lives in the present, butting against his present reality at all times. There's no capacity for a vision of the world that is above and beyond what it is. That happens to us all at different times and the function of the arts, to me, is to allow people that chance to imagine.

JM: Yeah

SJ: With Young Promoters, sometimes the first step for those kids is saying "we're going to put on this show" and for people to go "okay, yeah, you can do that" and all of a sudden, a light goes on- "what, we can do it?" And from then on it opens up their mind to the possibilities. Yeah. I don't believe in art as social work but I do believe it is intrinsically tied into the fabric of society.

JM: Yeah, good. Great stuff, I think we're about there. Um, thank you. There's an awful lot there just, that, a lot of it kind of complements the things I've been reading in stats, if you know what I mean, a lot of it complements what I've been thinking about. This idea of engagement as a permanent process seems to be the obvious solution... That I've, kind of, spoke to a couple of people from different organisations and from looking at materials so it's nice to have, um, someone such as yourself put that explicitly because it's an idea that's been dancing around for a while. So that was great. Do you have any questions for me at all, or anything that you need to know, or would like clarification on?

SJ: No, um, this is more for interest really. Why did you light on that.... Did you feel there was a central pressure down on organisations to force them to behave in a certain way?

JM: So, there's a fairly evident move from government to Arts Council to organisations. New Labour had these things called Public Service Agreements. One of the first major cultural policy pieces published by that government, by Chris Smith back in 97/98, was a collection of speeches and essays called *Creative Britain* which outlined the first New Labour mission. And he summed up the four goals of their policy as access, excellence, education and the economy and how the arts are going to work for all four of them and they can do them all at the same time and they're perfect. That turned into 6 overall objectives in terms of Public Service Agreements which, in turn, turned into 21 particular measures (I think, from memory). Those measures were, depending on what they asked the Arts Council to do, those measures were as vague as saying increase BME audiences to as specific as saying we want 500,000 more people a year at your flagship companies, so your National Theatres, Royal Opera House, that sort of stuff.

SJ: Yeah

JM: At the same time, where the Secretary of State would write a letter, effectively a boiler plate to the Arts Councils saying "there's your money, go and buy some culture", the letter they sent, increasingly, between 97 and 2007 went from one side of A4 to three sides of A4 to seven sides of A4 with particular ring fencing effectively and other requests. You then add to that increasing control (and changes) to lottery money and you then add to that central government funds going into things like the New Audiences Scheme where you have, effectively, rather than hands off grant-in-aid cash, you have an exact amount, £20 million across five years where the government says there is *that* money for *this* purpose, which in terms of arts policy, although it's not a bad policy (getting £20 million to get kids into the arts, say) it is a very definite step in a directive.... A particular direction. And so, in that context, although arts organisations were never told, as such, they made certain steps in those directions. So a lot of bigger arts organisations developed new educational officers in that period, they developed diversity outreach officers in that period, lots of little things that meant they were getting in tune with the environment.

SJ: Yeah

JM: Whether you say if that's directive or not, then I would say the choice was either you get involved or you starve, which isn't really a choice.

SJ: Yeah

JM: And so that kind of went on until 2007-2008. In 2008 there was a bit of a kickback with this thing called the McMaster review which essentially put excellence at the centre of the policy discussion. It said we've had too much of what they call "targetolatory", we've had too much of what they call targetolatory, the fact of the matter is great art is great for everyone, everyone loves Hamlet, so what we need to do is get rid of all the [political/social] experts, what we need to do is bring in judgement and bring back a sense of artistic knowledge as opposed to social or political knowledge. That kind of stuttered because in the last couple of years of New Labour there were an awful lot of cabinet changes, then you had the recession, then you had the new government so that it never really took flight in the way that that socially guided, or socially minded, decade did.

SJ: Yeah

JM: And so that's what I'm interested in, I'm interested in how, within that ten year period, because the official line, the celebratory line from the organisation is that it was brilliant "we were really struggling in 97 and by 2007 we were in a fantastic place" and I'm sure that to a degree that's true but I think that there are things lurking under the headlines that need a bit more thinking about. And this, in terms of access, in terms of engaging constantly or permanently re-engaging with it is one way of doing that.

SJ: It's interesting in that regard that excellence is a mantra that is used constantly now but access is still pushed as one of their major things.

JM: So they're the two foundational goals

SJ: Yeah

JM: They go way back to the 40s with Keynes but what's really interesting about excellence is that it's a very particular kind of excellence.

SJ: Yeah it is

JM: It's an excellence of product. It's like you say, it's one of those things of if you got 500 people involved in a show, in the making process or even just talking to artists throughout rehearsal and then went to see it and they said "well, that was amazing, that was really, really good", that's seemingly not favoured as much as a 5 star thing at the National. There is certainly an excellence of product as opposed to process and I think that needs to change. It's not that there shouldn't be high art or "good" art but that it's irrational and ill conceived, particularly at tight times, to throw 30 or 40 million at an organisation that reaches such a small number of people because it's "good". The alternative, in terms of getting people involved and building up trust and liking through the process of it seems to be a much more feasible [justifiable?] idea if we're just talking about use of money.

SJ: Yeah, I mean that has always been the case, that what people consider excellent is what their friends consider excellent and since most politicians are based in London it will always be what they see around them, what they experience and what their friends tell them are brilliant. Particularly if they don't know much about culture in the first place [laughter]. It just will be. And the sad thing about that is that the forms of experimentation and development and reaching out to audiences in different places that does go on always get bracketed under that, it used to be "community arts" and now it's "inclusion", as a bracket that kind of goes "but it's not really proper art". Whereas actually, for me, as I was saying, the artistic struggle today is in communities. It's not in theatres. I've worked in theatres a lot.... It's interesting how things develop, I worked for a company in Portugal, helped set up a theatre company in the mountains in Portugal which was basically with a guy who had moved to Portugal who had done an English and Drama degree in Warwick and farmers, three farmers. Three guys who were farmers in a village in the middle of nowhere and I started to work with him with Pentabus and we went from making shows, Graham and Eduardo, Eduardo was one of the farmers. Eduardo is one of the most uncommonly talented performers I've ever come across. He is so charismatic on stage, so watchable, so foreign looking as well. He looks properly Portuguese. [Laughter] We created a show there in a, literally in the equivalent of a barn on the side of a hill, that eventually made such waves in Portugal that people still talk about it, they still talk about it as a

show. And the last show I made with them was done as a co-production between them and the National Theatre in Portugal, you know, and it was presented in Lisbon. And it's that kind of, in Portugal they're loved because of that rootedness, that connectedness and they're seen as somehow real and more vital because of that. Whereas here that happens on the odd occasion but it tends to be hard fought things, I suppose it happens on the odd occasion in Portugal as well, I mean, I don't know, I don't live there. But I've worked there a lot. But they have a very, I wouldn't want their funding structure either where every time they have a change of government everything stops because it's Ministry of Culture and you have to wait until the new minister comes in and decides what they want to do.

JM: Yeah

SJ: So all the funding's frozen. It's a bit, I do think that there are pluses and minuses with everything.

JM: Yeah. I kind of realised fairly early on this project that the organisation, the Arts Council, is caught in an impossible place, in that they're caught in a triangle between government, artists and public. In research with artists, this being explicitly "proper" artists in the big buildings, artists overwhelmingly said that there's too much money going to social work or socially oriented arts work. Conversely, the public said that there's too much money going to namby-pamby arts that mean nothing to me, why is that happening? And then you have the government, of course, putting their own policy spin on everything. So, regardless of the truth of any of those statements, the fact of the matter is that organisation is always caught in the middle, surrounded by one limited paymaster that can within a fairly limited timeframe, so New Labour made significant changes after ten years, the coalition, the Conservative Government in turn have made another set of changes after four or five years, is being pulled in different directions. You then have, you effectively have to serve two groups who, to quite a large extent, don't like each other that much, or seemingly don't get on. They don't appear to have that much in common. So in many ways they're caught in this horrible situation. Not to say that I don't think they can't behave better but I started out, as you do when you start anything, I started out in a very crusading fashion, like I'm going to identify all the problems and then I'm going to fix it and then for a while I went down with almost, kind of, Stockholm Syndrome and developed, like, a great sympathy for the impossibility of the position, almost, and the difficulty of the situation. And now I'm hopefully reaching a point where, yes we're pointing out the problems but we're developing alternative, genuine alternative solutions.

SJ: Yeah.

JM: As opposed to just shouting at them for doing it wrong because that doesn't, you know what I mean, it's easy, it's not effective. But, yeah, like you say, it's a strange organisation and there are pluses and minuses to it and generally I think it's a lot of people working hard to do what they think is right but, of course, in practice what's underlying all those decisions about quality or about what public we want in there or how we want to get them in there or how it works and everything else? But, it's, it's a strange one.

SJ: It is, it is and I completely agree with you actually and we've had great support from the Arts Council over many years and they have been, um, we've had good questioning and good pressure from them to move and do things but also, they can be deeply frustrating and, generally, it's not the individual's fault, you know. In the time we've been dealing with Arts Council we've had so many

different Arts Officers and I have to say, I would say in recent years the quality of them has got better. When I first started dealing with Arts Council, when I was working for other theatre companies, a lot of the Arts Officers were rubbish. Just sort of wandering about, “yeah, yeah, that’s fine, just carry on”. Whereas there’s much more a sense of people actually knowing about what the mission, the joint mission for things is and I know mission’s a funny word but it is about trying to deliver.

JM: Yeah

SJ: I think they’re aware of the public and what we need so, yeah, I think I sort of agree with you. Nothing can not be improved but I do think that they’ve got a really hard job as well, holding the ring.

JM: Yeah, it’s a nightmare. The phrase one of my friends used is that you’re trying to plan the unplannable and, kind of, if you ever get into the big arguments about Arts funding, just at a very fundamental level yes or no, anyone can flip flop and say “ah well Van Gogh didn’t have any funding but then Shakespeare had patronage” so you can pick people from either side to support whatever perspective you want but neither of them effectively answer the challenge of how do you develop an infrastructure that allows people to be free enough to create things that are affecting and, like you were saying, have that transcendent quality that genuinely helps people in both a real and a “beyond-real” way. And it is an impossible the task. The main challenge they met over the last 15 to 20 years, particularly with theatre, is that 40 or 50 years ago you could point to Olivier or you could point to Gielgud and you could say “well, those guys sat on the board and who have we got now?” and there was a perception of a more technocratic move which opened them up to attacks from that kind of arts audience that says “well, why are we having blatantly politicians and bureaucrats making our choices for us” and that might be part of the issue that you’re talking about there, in that they don’t actually seem to be employing people who are engaged in what they’re doing and the that might have led to a more recent readjustment.

SJ: Hm.

JM: But, yeah

SJ: I think it’s absolutely certain that if we did not get support from Arts Council we would not exist, about fifty percent of our funding year on year comes from Arts Council and they raise the rest from other sources. But the rest is Arts Council funding and without.... You know the rest is trusts, it’s local authorities, it’s all sorts.... In that sense, there’s not an economic argument for Black Country Touring. There is a social and an artistic argument for Black Country Touring and the money for that has got to be found from somewhere. Or it doesn’t. But then the work wouldn’t happen. It’s not like, you know, I couldn’t afford to do what I’m doing, I just couldn’t afford to do it. The way its organised, it just wouldn’t happen and if people decide you no longer need it, I mean this is a discussion that we have at the board level quite a lot... If Arts Council, for whatever reason pulled out, that would be the end of the company and you just have to go “that’s alright, we’ll all just have to go and get jobs elsewhere”.

JM: It’s a strange one because you do get to that point of being.... Maybe apart from four or five companies that are “too big to fail” everyone’s on that level. I was talking with a Professor one time

about what would happen, in theory, if the National Theatre didn't fill in a funding application. If just for a laugh on year it went "well, we're not gonna do it". Of course, they would still exist, it wouldn't in that case... I don't think it would be stopped. But with everyone else it is a challenge and the economics of it particularly is difficult because so often the arts is a loser. Even if you sell out every night or even if you tick all your boxes, it's difficult to make money at affordable incomes.... At affordable prices.... So, obviously, with the West End and the bog and that sort of stuff, you're looking at £60-£70 a ticket or even more. But if you're working at a communal level and you're working with people in poor areas, there's no way you're going to cover back all your costs and everything else. I don't know. Call me crazy but maybe an economic rationale's not the best way to go [laughter]. Oh, I've been shouted down at conferences for that. They look at you and they go "well we need to be self-sustaining" well does it because, presumably, if we can afford to bomb countries we can afford to pay artists to a certain degree?

SJ: Yeah

JM: But that oddly doesn't go down well, even amongst generally left-liberal arts types. There's a certain kind of experience, a certain kind of pragmatism, it might have just been born out of the last experience with cuts and things, but there is a certain pragmatism that says "we need to make money, we need to be sustainable".

SJ: Yeah.... I think you can be sustainable at certain levels and in certain environments and you can have a completely.... If all the funding was withdrawn, then all the artists won't go away but they will make work in completely different ways and for different reasons. There will be.... It will be less available, it would be less available but, then, you do pay your money and take your choice.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. This reminds me of, there's a great.... I think it was, was it, Peter Hall had a running battle with Margaret Thatcher in the eighties because of the National and budget things over there when he was the director and she eventually snapped and was quoted as talking to one of her aides as "when can we stop giving money to that nasty man, Peter Hall" [laughter]. But there is very much that sense that even in stringent situations people are going to do it [art] because it's not a rational thing.

SJ: Yeah

JM: It's not.... It's not that side of the brain. SO that, money has become a part of it because money has become a part of everything but it won't stop it and it won't necessarily make it better. It's just sort of there, it's just sort of happening.

SJ: Great

JM: Cool. Well, thank you for that. It was genuinely very interesting and very, very helpful. What I'll do is write up the transcript of this in the next couple of days and send you copy of it.

SJ: Okay

JM: Because the main issue I have is that, as part of the primary research I'm trying to put, I'm putting the transcripts into the thesis so that as well as drawing certain lines from it to go in the actual chapters, I'm going to put the transcripts in as evidence of the work I've done, basically, just a

very simple tick box thing. But as part of that I'm giving people the chance to make any amendments they want and that might be something as big as saying "can you change the idea because I've had a rethink about this" or it might be just, like, language things. I interviewed somebody the other day who, after I emailed them they sent one back saying "can you take all the fucks out because I don't come across as eloquent as I'd like to" [laughter] and so just little things like that. I'll get it all written up and send it over to you and then if there is anything that you want to change, big or small, just let me know and I'm happy to make amendments then.

SJ: Great

JM: Otherwise, thank you for your time, that was really, really helpful

SJ: Thank you. It was interesting. Okay, cheers

JM: Bye-bye now

SJ: See you, bye.

05-06 ACE Core funding – £69,245; ACE project funding for resonate - £37086; total of all BCT income that year - £229,966 (i.e. ACE income was 46%)

06-07 Core – £71,149; Resonate - £31,899; total BCT income - £236,227 (ACE income was 43%)

07-08 Core - £73,106; Resonate - £26,319; total BCT income - £242,097 (ACE income was 41%)

08-09 Core - £105,082 Total BCT income - £238,424 (ACE income was 44%)

In 08-09 we got an uplift from ACE to bring the resonate work into the core of the company, which is why the core jumps up and resonate disappears.

**Interview Transcript with David Micklem, Senior Theatre Strategy Officer at Arts Council England,
2001-2007**

24/03/17

DM: Apologies for being a couple of minutes late, I was just finishing up a previous Skype, so apologies for that.

JM: No, no, you're quite alright. Thank you for talking to me.

DM: Pleasure.

JM: So, how these things have operated in the past, what I generally do is talk about myself and the project to begin with and then if you could give a brief outline of your time at the Arts Council and your role there and then we'll get into some more specific questions if that's okay?

DM: Sounds good.

JM: Okay. And just to be clear on some of the ethical things to begin with, this is being recorded and a transcript will be made and put into the thesis and equally bits of that transcript will be taken out and put directly into chapters. Before any of that happens, I will send you the finished version and if you want to amend things or change things, as little as taking ums and ahs out, just let me know and we can do that.

DM: Great.

JM: Equally, just so we're clear, I emailed you directly about talking, you responded positively and I haven't coerced you or put a gun to your head or anything like that?

DM: That's correct [laughter]

JM: Okay, so, my thesis is interested in, and is looking at, New Labour's first ten years in power and looking at how their push, both in funding levels and policy interest in the arts impacted on how the Arts Council was operating in that period.

DM: Yep

JM: I'm looking particularly at the issues of access, excellence and then the economics operating behind the scenes of everything. The things I'm most interested in talking to you about the today is the economics and the excellence side of things, then, kind of, with public engagement sitting behind both of those and that question of "how do we do both of those things to better service the public", if that makes sense?

DM: Yep

JM: Yep and I'm interested in your role, from inside the process, about how your experiences work in relation to what policy was written down, what policy was presented.

DM: And how did you get to me, Joe? How did you find me in this context, just out of interest?

JM: So, I've been doing a fair bit of googling and a fair bit of research on public engagement throughout the New Labour period but the real connection to yourself came when I spoke to Daniel Brine at the Cambridge Arts Centre and we had a long conversation about access. And he spoke to me about *64 Million Artists*, your current position, and said that a lot of the different things we were talking about in our conversation – the difference between product and process, and how excellence might develop in different ways – he said that your project might be interesting to me in that regard but at that point I started looking into things and googled yourself and found that earlier match.

DM: Gotcha. Because it's worth saying in terms of that New Labour period, my phase at the Arts Council was 2001 to 2007.

JM: Yes

DM: So very much at the centre of those first ten years of the New Labour government and in that period that Tony Blair, famously at the Tate Modern, called a "Golden Age" for the arts and culture for this country. And I was very lucky, fortunate to be in that position of influence during a period of significant growth for the Arts Council. It was certainly a golden age for the Arts Council as well as for arts and culture during that period.

JM: Good stuff. So, then, if you were to just describe your role in there as a Senior Theatre Strategy Officer, how would your average daily look like at that time?

DM: I was principally doing three things, it was very different Arts Council in that period. I think the employee base was 880 people working there. I think there's probably half of that many people now working there. It was a much bigger organisation, I don't know the exact figures, you've probably got them yourself. And as such, the national office, which was where I was based, had a much more, had a much greater capacity and a much greater leadership role and strategic role around the development function of the Arts Council. I was principally doing three things. One is that I had a range of clients, theatre companies who were making work around my specialism which was contemporary performance. So now, you might have relationship managers based out of regional offices who have a dozen or so clients, I was looking after, at the national office, probably around a dozen clients who were doing work in contemporary performance that had a national impact.

JM: Yes

DM: So companies like Forced Entertainment, like Knee High were clients of mine when I was at the Arts Council. During my tenure at the Arts Council those clients then got devolved to regional colleagues but during the period I was there that was one of my jobs. The second is that I, on behalf of the theatre department, I looked after the national touring programme. The national touring programme was the principal mechanism for distributing work nationally. Did what it said on the tin and it was an open access programme, largely comprising lottery funds, and its aim was the distribution of excellent work to audiences around the country. SO, I chaired the panel and led on the distribution of fairly significant sums of money, I think £13 million a year to touring companies. Not just within the context of my specialism, contemporary performance, but across the board so other colleagues in the theatre department also then making decisions about how national touring funds were distributed.

JM: Yep

DM: So, that was the second role. And then the third role was one, and it's one I don't think we see as much now because of that issue around capacity is a kind of strategic lead around the development function of an Arts Council. So as well as being a Senior Strategy Officer my default title was Head of Contemporary Performance at the Arts Council. As such, my role was to support the strategic development of a range of art form practice that took in things like circus, street arts, devised theatre, puppetry, mime, physical theatre. So, using a short hand, the stuff that sits outside of the mainstream really.

JM: Yep

DM: That was my principal strategic focus and as such I would commission reports into the state of a particular art form. So, I've published reports into circus and street arts and then a sort of series of recommendations and even funding streams to support those developments. So, using strategic funds, which the Arts Council used to have much greater access to, to deliver against those ambitions. So, I was able to, in the context of street arts, to provide some sort of catalyst funding for a consortia of festivals to commission largescale outdoor work and that consortia became Without Walls which is an ongoing consortium of outdoor festivals. So, yeah, deploying reasonably significant strategic funds to make interventions into contemporary performance to develop connections, develop new ways of working, support areas of practice that perhaps needed additional focus.

JM: Yes. Excellent. So, just while we're talking about deploying funds, I think it might be a good time to start talking about economics and the, kind of, the financial situation. From things I've read, based on the green book at the time, all the creative industries buzz and also within the organisation's reviews itself, there seems to be a move away from the way the Council presented itself as an organisation that supported artists and freed them from market concerns to an organisation that started investing in contenders and, kind of, really emphasising the commercial impact and the commercial possibilities of the arts generally and, of course, within that, theatre and contemporary performance. So, I'm just curious as to your experience of that turn I suppose, away from this almost insulating, if I've got that right, this insulating force to this mixed economy pushing, commercially minded – or more commercially minded – organisation.

DM: I definitely recognise what you're saying and I suppose another way of phrasing that, not as sophisticated a way as you've just said, is that when I joined the Arts Council in 2001 commercial was a dirty word

JM: Yes

DM: And by the time I left in 2007, there was a recognition of a mixed ecology which was absent six years before hand and a growing recognition that the Arts Council had a role to play across a broad ecology of practice which incorporated amateur work, professionally led work, professionally led work which connected to the creative industries or commercial activity.

JM: Yeah

DM: And I think that the Arts Council perhaps developed a greater maturity around recognising the fact that it had a role to play within the activity of that spectrum, rather than just, it's there to just provide a backstop for something that sits outside of commercial.

JM: Yes

DM: And so, I'm trying to think of an example. Towards the end of my time at the Arts Council. I remember there being quite a significant grant being made to Adventures in Motion Pictures, clearly a commercial proposition. And the money that was given to AMP was given as, kind of, effectively an endowment to support the creation and development of new work which would then would be clearly commercially exploited, the very best of that work. That commercial exploitation would then lead to profit which could go back into the endowment. At the beginning of my tenure at the Arts Council, in 2001, I think investment in that way would have been unthinkable because it would have been seen as a commercial entity and why would the Arts Council have a relationship with that particular organisation. So, I can definitely recognise that trend that you're describing over the period I was there and a growing confidence around the fact that there's a complex ecology across arts and culture and that individuals and companies ebb and flow between the commercial and the heavily subsidised with a much greater degree of flexibility that perhaps the Arts Council might have previously recognised when it was saying "actually, we don't do commercial".

JM: Yep. Great. So, it wouldn't surprise you then to find out that by 2008-09, in a post-recession world, there was a big push on, not just the ability of the arts to contribute but that is their best ability, almost, what they can do in the wake of economic collapse.

DM: Yes, absolutely

JM: That wouldn't surprise you?

DM: No. I suppose the other thematics I would have observed during that phase of the Arts Council was a sense of the importance of instrumentalism, a set of New Labour agendas that seemed to be impacting on work and there was a lot of very lively debate within the arts council about, you know, the classic arts for arts' sake versus art for the sake of pushing a particular social agenda. And there was definitely a creeping sense that we were witnessing more and more applications for funding coming in that would have another output attached to them beyond art for art's sake.

JM: Yeah

DM: So, increasing numbers of pieces of work that might have a commitment to reducing knife crime in inner city contexts.

JM: Yeah, yeah

DM: I Certainly was aware of a growth of that kind of approach to making work

JM: So with that in mind, then, and the response to it that you and your colleagues gave, do you think it was one of those things where you start talking to the government they're using in the language they're using because it's easier they understand it.....

DM: yes

JM: Or do you think there was a more ingrained acceptance of these ideas?

DM: I think probably the former, it was about finding a different way of making the case to government.

JM: Yep

DM: And justifying the significant additional investment that was being made through the Arts Council, reporting back on that not by just saying “of aren’t the arts and cultural sector a wonderful thing and isn’t it great that more money’s being put it” but, actually, “aren’t the arts and culture sectors great *and* there also impacting on well-being, mental health, reduction of crime, risk of reoffending and all of these other sorts of agendas that were, felt like they were reaching a degree of public discussion.

JM: You’d get a sense then, that, regardless of whatever the government agenda was or, even, whatever government it was, there’d definitely be some meeting ground, changing of policy or bending of language to suit the way the winds blowing?

DM: Yes, I think so. And I suppose worth saying, in an organisation that employed over 800 staff, lots of healthy internal debate about where on that spectrum instrumentalism, art for arts’ sake, any particular project, any particular company, any particular artist might sit. And I think, we very actively engaged in an internal dialogue about that.

JM: Yes, yep. That leads me neatly onto the final question about the money. Ultimately, I suppose, I’m interested in that balance between the responsibility of taking government cash and having to live up to the obligations of it but then also having the freedom to do your own thing and not the let money direct you too much, if you know what I mean? So, I suppose, I’m just interested in your perspective on where do you think, I know it’s a huge question, but where do you think the ideal balance lies?

DM: I think that’s an impossible question and I think that the only way to hazard an answer to it is to say that we would take those decisions on a case by case basis.

JM: Yep

DM: You know, rather than saying it’s in the middle or it’s 5 out of 10 on that spectrum, I think it really depends on the individual project and I suppose a parallel example is, in the office I used to share with colleagues, just outside the office the original royal charter was framed on the wall. So, the original royal charter from 1946 that established the Arts Council, talking about the twin....

JM: The goals

DM: yeah, exactly, the twin goals of excellence and access and, you know, that debate continues to rage on about, perhaps it’s a false opposition or a false binary to talk about access and excellence being at opposite ends of the spectrum, but invariably there was a lot of tension expressed in every project, and every discussion we had about projects at the Arts Council, between those two ends of the spectrum, if you do accept the binary. I.E. Here’s a piece of work that clearly, demonstrably is going to reach people who don’t otherwise have access to arts and culture. This is getting into communities that would otherwise have no access to arts and culture and it’s not very good. Do we fund that? Or the other end of the spectrum, this is clearly a world class artist at the top of her game

but it's only going to be seen by a limited number of people in certain metropolitan centres in the UK. Do we fund it?

JM: Yeah

DM: That instrumental art versus art for arts' sake seems as much about personal judgement as any, kind of, scientific approach.

JM: Okay. So, with that in mind then and moving onto the excellence and the aesthetic side of things, I'm curious to know how excellence worked when you were there? Obviously, it's such a difficult term and a big term, but I'm genuinely curious to know how you would support high quality work or how you would develop strategies to ensure the development of high quality work? Is that clear?

DM: I think the question's clear. I'm not sure I'm going to have any clarity in my answer. Half an answer or towards an answer perhaps is that in that phase, from 2001 to 2007, one of the shifts in the Arts Council was that we went from decision making being peer led to being internally driven. By that I mean when I started working on the national touring panel in 2001, we had an external panel that would meet quarterly to take those decisions about how to distribute that £13 million for touring. That would be people running theatres, people running theatre companies, critics, experts and there would be a dozen of them that would sit on what was then called drama panel who would take those decisions and they'd also take decisions about the portfolio. Who's in the portfolio and who's not, what level of support might they get? By the time I left, all of those panels had been decommissioned and all of those decisions were being taken internally. What comprises quality was very much an internal Arts Council discussion rather than one that involved people from outside the organisation. But, yes, quality is a very loaded question. What I might deem to be quality might be very different from what you deem it to be. I'm guessing that, from my brief flash of who you are, you come from a certain cultural background, a certain educational background and we might agree around a certain set of quality issues but they might be very different from a colleague that comes from a black, working class, inner city background that has a very different sense of what comprises quality

JM: Yeah

DM: I think that's one of the things I'm dealing with now with *64 Million Artists* is the notion of whose quality is it? Despite all the best efforts of the Arts Council between 201-2007, it was still a largely middle class, metropolitan, university educated, largely white organisation making decisions about what was quality. You then get a very narrow lens into what comprises art and comprises great art. I suppose what we're trying to do with *64 Million Artists* is shatter some of those preconceptions about what is art, what is creativity and who says what's good?

JM: Yes

DM: I live here in Brixton and, at the end of my street, there are dozens of hairdressers on a Friday night, all open till 12 o'clock at night, and I would argue that there is some extraordinary art and creativity happening in those salons with men's hair and women's hair but the Arts Council doesn't get anywhere near all of that stuff. It's neither deemed to be art nor quality

JM: No

DM: So, I think that's probably a very rambling answer to your question, but it's tricky as to how those aesthetic decisions are taken and I felt a responsibility as a civil servant, as a reasonably well-paid employee of the Arts Council to reflect a sort of general view of where quality lay.

JM: So, with that internal move, then, the move away from having peer panels and external voices to a more internal discussion.

DM: yeah

JM: Excellence would still be a priority

DM: definitely

JM: but it would just be co-ordinated and voiced by different people

DM: yes, by people who were working within the Arts Council

JM: I only wanted to get that clear because a little after you left the McMaster Review came out, I don't know if you've read it or heard of it.

DM: Absolutely, yeah

JM: That made a big song and dance about we've got too far into targetology, they've become burdensome, there's a lack of true judgement as opposed to bureaucratic expertise and it called for a return to "excellence". And I find it curious because I find it hard to believe that, even when things aren't going as well as you think they could be or even when things aren't operating in a way that you'd like, I find it hard to believe that any Arts Council would so easily forget almost, forget what excellence is or forego that commitment to it.

DM: Mm-mm

JM: I'm just curious to know what your take on the position of excellence was by the time that you left? So, that even if it's being voiced internally, was it a priority, was it being given the same weighting as public outreach or crime reduction or that sort of thing?

DM: From my, kind of, foggy recollection the twin goals of the Arts Council, excellence and access, were very equally debated and I would imagine that during that New Labour phase and that golden age pre-recession that there was an increasing focus around access and, as a result of that, increasing resources were put into some fairly nascent arts forms. And I'm thinking here about circus, street arts, carnival that were seen to reach the parts that other art forms didn't reach.

JM: Yep

DM: Quite significant sums. Millions of pounds of money put into carnival, circus and street arts because of that access agenda and the desire to get work more widely seen and I suppose one could argue that some of that work wasn't of a sufficiently high standard

JM: Yes

DM: And so perhaps, criteria around quality were less stringently deployed in areas around circus or street arts because of a desire to cultivate an ecology that would get into people's lives that wouldn't otherwise have access to the arts and culture. And I'm guessing that McMaster was a response to that, to get back in touch with what's really of high quality and let's make that an Arts Council focus

JM: Yes, absolutely. But it's a strange one because it's written, and pitched, as this, kind of, revolutionary change and its very much supported by the minister at the time who was [James] Purnell.

DM: Yep

JM: But he was moved on about 6 months afterwards, he was moved up as one of Gordon Brown's reshuffles. And then the recession happened. So, you have this really interesting moment where you have this huge, sort of, trumpet or clarion call but the actuality of it or the practicalities of it fall on the real world getting in the way. So that's what it was, it was just a curiosity about, there's definitely still concerns over excellence in 2006-2007, they haven't disappeared and it's just about finding that balance between where we were in 2006-07 and then in 2008 when that need for change was voiced, the validity of that or the legitimacy of that, and I suppose the idea of letting quality slip in more engaging or more expansive art forms at the expense of getting new people in seems like a decent answer to it.

DM: Definitely

JM: Because, of course, at the same time, I don't imagine that The National or the ROH was putting out "bad" shows, do you know what I mean?

DM: Yeah

JM: It wasn't like that they were week on week putting out am-dram or whatever and it seems like one way of responding to that....

DM: And I wonder whether we're back there now? Given the state, economically and politically, that we're in right now, I have a sense that the Arts Council is once again perhaps pulling more towards the access, goal 2, end of the spectrum....

JM: Yes

DM: than it is the quality end of the spectrum. In a world where, so-called experts are the laughing stock of the right-wing press.

JM: "We've had enough of experts" [laughter]

DM: And in a world where the Warwick commission of 2015 finds that it's still the 8% highest educated, most socially mobile, etc..... you'll know the statistic

JM: Yeah

DM: I think there's increasing pressure on the Arts Council once again, given that it distributes the taxes of everyone in this country, looking at ways that it can be broader in its reach so I think that we're looking at a recurrence of that pull away from excellence right now, towards engagement and access

JM: Yes, yep. So, you'd say that the policy on excellence, then, is conditional on the situation that it's operating in or the context that it finds itself?

DM: Yes, yep. I think that's right.

JM: Okay. That's great. So, that is, looking at the time, we're about there for the end of your half hour and that is, fortunately, the end of all my questions.

DM: Fantastic

JM: Thank you ever so much, is there anything....

DM: Joe, really good to talk to you, is there anything else to say? You will have picked up on it, my focus has always been very much on theatre, I don't know if your research is going to be across art forms or....

JM: No, no. So, I'm operating out of the drama department at Royal Holloway, so it is all theatre based.

DM: So again, you will have come across this in your research, but for me one of the kind of pivotal shifts in that era was the theatre review. The theatre review came out of Peter Boyden report which I think was probably 2000?

JM: 2001?

DM: 2001. Then the theatre review being the kind of lever which secured the additional £25 million for theatre.

JM: Yes

DM: Two things about that, one is that obviously had a significant impact particularly on the English regional touring theatres, so the 50 or so building based producing theatres around the country who had been, after 14 odd years of Tory cuts, had been decimated. And that extra £25 million, a lot of that went back into those producing theatres and I think led to a decade of great work and a greater confidence in those producing theatres. And also, the £25 million that Boyden and others secured also impacted profoundly on the sectors that I was more interested in; the non-building based, the non-traditional, the non-text based, the contemporary performance. So, of that £25 million, even though it was argued for on the basis of a crisis in the regional producing theatres not all of it ended up going to them and some of it was retained to support the new generation of theatre makers: The Kneehighs, the Forced Entertainments, The Improbables, those kinds of companies which now are making work that informs contemporary practice. They definitely inform what the National is doing. So, it felt like the £25million was a holistic investment in an ecology of theatre practice, not just in the 50....

JM: Yeah. Fix this particular problem.

DM: Exactly, I suppose I was lucky enough to have... I just got the spoils of that.... I arrived and there was just a lot more money swishing around and I was very happy to spend that on what I think were the right decisions at the time but I didn't have to get involved in making the case in the years that led up to that.

JM: Great stuff.

DM: Joe, really good to talk to you. If you could be in touch when you know that you've got a draft you can look at so I can just check for the things that I didn't quite get right, or the grammatical errors or the ums and ahs which would be great to get erased from the record.

JM: Of course, in all likelihood I'm looking at Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon so I'll be in touch at the beginning of next week.

DM: Great stuff.

JM: Thank you ever so much, that's really, really useful and you have a good evening, too.

DM: All the best, cheers.

JM: Cheers now, bye-bye.

Interview Transcript with Jon Spooner, Founding Member and Artistic Director at Unlimited Theatre

25/04/17

JM: Hello

JS: Hi Joe

JM: Good morning, Jon. How are you?

JS: I'm not very well, since you ask, so I apologise for the wildness of my hair, mostly.

JM: [laughter] You're alright. I'm in a similar place at the minute myself so you're okay. Just so we're clear at the beginning, I'd like you to know that I am recording this so that anything you say will be documented and written down and transcribed and I just want to make clear, for ethical reasons, that I've approached you through email, asked you to do this and you've agreed to do it willingly. I've haven't put a gun to your head.

JS: Not yet, no.

JM: Might get there soon. So, how this normally works, you have about an hour, a little less than an hour?

JS: Yes. I've got a meeting at half past ten.

JM: Right, no problem. How this has normally worked in the past is that I've spoken a bit about what I'm doing with my PhD and what I'm interested in and then people I'm interviewing have introduced their role and their theatre companies, generally, and from there we go on and talk about issues specifically and I've got a few questions in mind. Hopefully that's all clear and good for you.

JS: Yeah. Who else have you been speaking to?

JM: I've been talking to David Micklem, who was the Senior Theatre Officer with the AC from 2001-2007. I've been talking to some of the people from Black Country Touring down in the Midlands. I've had some people at the Cambridge Arts Centre and then there's a couple of other offers that are in the wind at the moment, with Pilot Theatre Company and then there's one more in London that I forget at the moment. But they're generally all companies that developed around 1997 onwards and then had an upswing in official public support in that 13 year period. And in your case, what I'm particularly interested in, is that you've managed to do public engagement work with kids whilst also maintaining a high quality output, aesthetically, because there's a lot of discussion and debate that I've looked into that suggests you would struggle to do one and do the other. It's interesting to me, in that, you seem to have cracked it in a way that other people I've looked into have struggled with. If that makes sense?

JS: Hmmmm. What's the title of the PhD?

JM: Uh, it's a work in progress. At the moment it seems to be called *Creative Britain? Troubling the Narrative of Arts Funding Under New Labour*. So, it seems to be in access, as one goal, they were talking about how they got lots more people in [between 97-10] but actually if you unpick the

numbers it's not as simple as that. With the money issue, in terms of who gets funding and how, there was a big push towards marketisation and being better businesses but again, depending on who you talk to, the impact of that push is not as clear cut as that. Then with excellence and aesthetic quality, there was this concern that for the first ten years, excellence as a quality got sidelined for more social missions and then started to come back but, again, it's more complicated than that because I don't believe that for 10 years everybody was making bad theatre that *just* ticked boxes. It just doesn't seem feasible. So basically, the idea of the thesis is to take these established narratives or these established talking points and drill down into them to get a better understanding of what's going on. And part of that is through secondary research and desk based work, part of that is through number crunching, materialist analysis and finance work and then the other part of that is through primary research with people who had experience in the period.

JS: Just talking about these established narratives, where are they established?

JM: So, you see them peddled in annual reviews, you see them peddled in policy documents and speeches. And then also within critical literature, there's a big – neoliberal is probably the most famous example – everything you read about, discourses of arts funding and New Labour, seem to be peddled as this neoliberal turn. And it seems to miss the distinction between neoliberalism being a very, very specific thing, defined around 11 or 12 specific points, and then just a more general, business savvy, capitalist idea. And the idea that you can be business savvy without being neoliberal or the fact that there isn't..... that it's not a binary..... not a polarised sort of thing. So, it's just about looking at the smaller range or limited range of language that we use to talk about these things and pulling them apart and seeing what's actually going on underneath.

JS: I'm interested as well that you talk about these established narratives being peddled, you used the word peddled twice, which feels like there's an agenda there, Joe?

JM: On my behalf or.....

JS: Yeah, on your behalf

JM: I mean, I think, from a government perspective, it's not that governments lie (necessarily) but I think it's that they want to be shown, or they want to show themselves as being successful, to be achieving things, so I think that there is certainly a push towards "look at what we're doing and look at how we're doing it" and I think that that emphasis is a choice. I mean, whether it's as extreme as if they're actually huckstering things, I wouldn't say so but I think there's definitely a conscious choice to emphasise facts in certain ways, or emphasise achievements in certain ways that fits a definite goal or a definite idea.

JS: How do you feel about the arm's length policy because I'm only wondering, you're talking a lot about the government, but public money comes through the Arts Council which is not a government department.

JM: No, but I would say that from everything I've read and people I've spoken to it seems to be that the arm's length was a.... compromised, questionable idea. Not in the sense that it's direct control, of course. But in the sense that, if you're getting your money from certain areas or if certain people are pushing agendas there is an inevitable response to that, a reaction to it, and so it was the sense of.... In something as explicit and simple as..... in Arts Council reviews from 98,99,2000 talking about

how they “embrace government directive”, how they are working closely with government directives to more practical things like the Secretary of State, when they write letters to the Arts Council giving the grant-in-aid, the letters started out being boiler plate “here’s the money, go off and do art for a year or three years” to becoming increasingly detailed. So that, by 2004, Tessa Jowell was writing 7 or 8 page documents along with the grant-in-aid, effectively ring fencing, in certain cases, where funding goes and how it should be spent. So, I think there is freedom with the creative choices within the Arts Council but I think that the parameters of those choices were very much set or influenced by government agendas. Does that make sense?

JS: It does. I’m only aware of, you seem to have a well-established take on it, so I’m interested in how the conversation goes and I’m hoping that we’ll both be able to stay open to the possibility that those established narratives... that it’s not always simple.

JM: No, no, no.... I’m curious, from your experience of.... When you established the company in 1997... What has been your experience of those 13 years, going from a newly established company to, now, an NPO? How has that history developed for you, I suppose?

JS: That’s a very big question, Joe. I don’t honestly know how to answer it or where to begin.

JM: Okay. No problem.

JS: I mean, it’s a huge question.

JM: I suppose what I’m getting at then, breaking it down into brass tacks, how would you describe the work you do? On a daily basis, what does your work look like?

JS: It really depends and I think that this is something that makes us, maybe, quite different and unique in the sector. When we set out, it’s all about making the work. So, in 1997, there was six of us that set up the company,

JM: Yes

JS: We’d come out of Leeds University, we wanted to continue making work together, we were interested in companies at the time that were working as companies and I think that’s something interesting that you don’t see very much in the portfolio anymore, companies that are companies of artists. But at the time, it felt like there was a lot of that about. We were inspired by Forced Entertainment, working as a company. Not necessarily in terms of the style of work but just that they were a group of people, like a band.

JM: Yep.

JS: Companies that have fallen by the wayside, like Fecund, who were very active for a long time when we were starting out and growing up and then looking at other parts of central and eastern Europe, the companies there that were long established and working together like Garzzinica [?]. We wanted to be in a band, really, but none of us were..... Only one of us was good enough to actually be in a band. So, we wanted to keep making shows together and, inside that, it became very quickly apparent.... We’ve always been an artist-led organisation. There was six artists there but, from the outset, it became very clear that if we wanted to actually make that work then we would have to operate really smartly as a company.

JM: Yep

JS: And there's no getting away from the fact, we only ever wanted to be sustainable, to make enough money to pay us what we needed to pay the bills. You don't get into this game to be wealthy.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

JS: But you still have to run really well as a company. I mean the thing that kills everyone is cashflow, people run out of money because they go "oh look, we've got this amount and it's going to cost this amount", but they don't look at....

JM: How it falls?

JS: yeah. So, we learnt a lot from..... At the time there were great organisations, probably Arts & Business, I can't remember who it was, you know, 20 years ago.

JM: Hmmm

JS: And I think my frontal lobe is probably decaying. But there was quite a lot of support for companies and organisations starting up. We were supported by The Prince's Trust, it was like two grand with which we bought our first computer and a video camera which was part of the business..... The idea that, 20 years ago, there was one computer in our office, which we shared. There was one email address, which we shared. That Paul, who was one of the company members, I remember walking into the office one morning and he said "has the email postman been?"

JM: Yeah.

JS: And there was also organisations, I can't remember what it called, like I say, maybe it was Arts & Business, that would connect you with people working in business and that was basically how we learnt to do, I say we, Liz who was.... So, we all had a title, we're all artists, we're all makers. Liz was Company Manager. I was Tour Booker. Louisa was Education Officer. It's just job titles. We always say, anyone can have whatever job title they want. Some days, I can be high wizard. I can be Artistic Director with the people that I need to be. I can be Creative Director if I'm working with people from media agencies because that's more understandable for them. Some days, I'm just a writer, someday I'm a director, some days I'm a performer, depending on what I'm doing on a day-to-day basis because you're constantly making it up as you go along and you've got to do different things. So, the titles of Education Officer, whatever, was just so that when we spoke to the people that we needed to be working with, they were secure in doing that. And I think that we've always been very good as a company in helping other people, because basically, it's the same thing that you do with audiences, with the people that you are making the art with, helping you understand what it is that we're doing because it seems odd to you, because we're not, we're not.... Normal, I guess. You're doing stuff that sits far enough away from the mainstream for people to feel nervous about it and, therefore, they're not likely to want to support it. So that was all about helping people feel secure and that we could run a company and a business. A friends of our, Colin. What is Colin? Colin used to run clubs in Leeds. He's now a property developer in Leeds. He knows how to make money and he always said "you know, if you guys were to do almost anything else, you'd all be really rich".

JM: (laughter) That's great.

JS: That's not what we want, That's not the end game. But then, to be fair, the people that have left the company, Liz and Louisa, left at a stage when we're starting families and wanted to have kids and they've retrained to become solicitors and psychologists and have been very successful.

JM: Yeah, yeah. So is that sort of fluidity, then, that kind of ability to jump from role to role and title to title [artistically], its useful for you but it's also, not a protective thing, but a beneficial thing in that it helps you speak other people's languages.

JS: Hmmm. There are real lessons to be learnt from other sectors. There's a lot of people still, I mean it's less so now, I think the new generation of artists simply don't have the same opportunities. When we started out, we could sign on, we could get housing benefit. So, for the first 9 months of operating the company, and this is the deal we made with ourselves, for the first 9 months we will sign on and take housing benefit but that's only to put ourselves in a position that, in 9 months' time, the company is generating enough income, the equivalent of that, so that we saw it as a way of supporting us. But you can't do that now.

JM: No

JS: Which is, which is fucked up. And that's the Tories.

JM: Yes.

JS: But there are lessons to be learnt. There's real value in looking at other sectors and the way that other companies and businesses run. There's a reason that these structures exist. There's a reason why it's important to learn about cashflows. I always say to people, about when we started out, we signed a piece of paper, the six of, and agreed what we wanted to achieve, over what time frame and that's how long we would commit to doing it. In our instance, we all committed to two years together. We're going to do these things, were going to aim to achieve these things, we're going to make this commitment to each other and if any of us wanted to duck out of that at any stage, then this was the notice period that we would give to each other so that we can all be really secure in the fact that we were going to be in this together and it became a real collective like that. But it became, it was important that it was formalised because that was just clear for us, and really reassuring. But it also meant that we knew that we can't just be in a rehearsal room, the idea that you can just be in a rehearsal room all the time, which is, ideally, what everyone wants, right?

JM: Hmm. Yeah

JS: It's not going to work. We're not living in Germany where you're massively subsidised to be a rep company and that's never been the case.

JM: With that in mind, then, knowing that the money has to come from different places and that you can learn from different people, partnership and collaboration was something that you were interested in working with from the very beginning, out of necessity as much as anything else, I suppose. Or was there a genuine interest in.....

JS: A genuine interest, yeah. I mean it's both.

JM: Yeah

JS: You can only do these things if you do them sincerely. We're interested in interesting things and we're interested in working with interesting people and that's why we work with the people that we have. There are times, yeah, when we've.... Some of the gigs that we did, which were the corporate gigs to just make some money, so that we could put it..... Everything went straight back into the pot that allowed us to fund the projects and pay the rent. They were gigs that came through a mate of mine from school, who was running an events company and he'd get us in to do stuff and it was probably a bit shit, actually, because we didn't understand that world and that sector. But, yeah, we always said that the payoff for doing the hard work and doing the work that you don't necessarily enjoy or even to want to have to do is this is what allows us what we want to do. And the company's seen colleagues, friends fall by the wayside, become disillusioned and depressed by the fact that they can't make it work. You've got to earn your stripes, I think.

JM: Yeah. So, it's like, it's part of it then. It's all part of the same experience I suppose, in that they're not. They're linked. You do one so that you can do the other, as opposed to "this is not what we do" and "this is what we do". Is that clear?

JS: Yeah, it's just how we chose to run.....

JM: Yeah, so at what point.....

JS: All of the work that we did took the values of our work through them. So that the corporate part of what we did started with us making shit events in corporate settings, it turned into us saying "well, this is shit, we don't enjoy it. It's not working for them. We're not even earning that much money from it because we're artists and we're continuing to be exploited, basically, because we'll work for less money than other events companies." How do we translate what we do into a meaningful way? So, actually, Liz, who led on that, who is our Company Manager, who I'm married to, she retrained as a psychologist, but a lot of the work that she does now and the work that she developed with the company was about how do you turn the arts practice that we have, which is about collaboration, how you work with people, how you value people in teams, how you set up a working rehearsal environment in which everyone can feel genuinely valued and that they have ownership of the thing that they're making. How do you translate that into an environment which is about making widgets for beer cans? It's the same, she talks about teaching people to be nice to each other. So, the way that we made that work was to keep the value of the work that we were making as a company, as artists and translate that over into other environments. So, they're not separate really, it's just working with different people. And they're all human beings right? And that's if you're working in a school setting as well, or working with the older people who we worked with through Age Concern, or working with the group of young mothers who had come out of the care system, the values and the attitude are the same, or with the investment bankers. It's the same, it's just in a different context.

JM: Yeah. So, do you think that's part of, a central part of your success as a company, that you're operating from that level of humanity, a fundamental socialness to being live in a space with someone in a way that, I suppose, visual art or listening to music over CD or over media, do you think that's a part of your success? That you've tapped into that and explored that idea in very different ways? Or is that too big a label to put on it?

JS: Don't know the answer to it. I think it's just that we're really good at what we do. I've stopped pretending, you know there's too much.... I mean some of the people that you name that you're talking to haven't made very good work. And there's a lot of bitterness in the sector around how the funding is handed out. But a lot of the time that's because your work was a bit shit. And it doesn't matter what the Arts Council write about it, it's whether or not the promoters, the producers, the people in the sector, the people that are consistent that are there and that stay the course and, then, the audiences, the people, they will tell you if you're work is any good. It doesn't matter if its recorded, on screen, "live", although I would say that the performing arts more than any other medium have that power to affect people in a way that... more than any others... but you know, people who make music would probably say the same. But, yeah, audiences will let you know, either by telling you, reviews about it or they just stop coming.

JM: Yeah. With that in mind then, would you say that your experience with the company is that you're sort of doing your thing and then the Arts Council's *there*, and you're going to them because the money's there but you wouldn't say that you were directed or pressured or responding to their ideas and their issues?

JS: They've always been really clear with what the deal is. If you're going to take, there's a responsibility that comes with.... So I always talk about, I can't remember who it was who first did this. His name's John something, does a lot of research and writes papers for the Arts Council.

JM: John Holden? No?

JS: Maybe. I don't think so. He talks about language being a powerful thing and it's "contributed income" rather than "subsidy"

JM: Yep

JS: Subsidy has really negative connotations. So its contributed income. But it is public money and there's a real responsibility that comes with that and I think that the way that the company was set up, in terms of it being entirely equal, that we're all co-creators, that even if we've got job titles everyone gets paid the same, that we're all co-founders of the company, that that attitude comes from a background of wanting to take personal responsibility for the fact that if this is public money then it comes with a responsibility and the conditions that comes with and that's part of what you accept by accepting the money.

JM: Yep

JS: Now, whether or not, how much sort of lip service you pay to that, so the responsibility is still there to deliver because this is public money. Whether or not everything Arts Council needs or wants you to do gets enacted is another choice. Also, we very lucky, we had a very longstanding relationship with a brilliant Drama Officer at the time. A man called Mark Hollander. And this period that you're interested in, seeing companies get that increase, that came from a very long form conversation with someone who we had a very good, clear, honest, working relationship with. He understood the work. He understood who we were as human beings and as people and admired and respected that. And we set out from the beginning that that conversation was going to be one of openness and honesty and also one a conversation about the work and not just about how we get

the money. And that was enormously important because I know at the time, a lot of our peers and contemporaries, were talking about not having very good or positive relationships with those people.

JM: Yeah

JS: So, in that way I think we were very lucky as well and, in honesty, the Arts Council in Yorkshire, where we're based, was known, I think at the time for being very good. The people that were there, and a lot of them are still there, really good people. Genuinely interested in the work and the artists and were consistent. To the point where Mark ended up leaving Arts Council, he'd moved on from being our Relationship Manager at this stage, but he came and he worked as our Exec Director and has only recently moved on to go to a bigger company. So, I think that was very important, that that relationship was very personal with that person and a very productive relationship so they could feel secure in us because, as a small company, we're quite expensive and look a bit risky because we're spending a lot of money on making art. And I always fought the battle, when they were looking to make more mainstream sense of how that money's spent to see real outputs, and we got told off a few years ago for having made a bad application in the NPO rounds and my response was "yeah, but you gave us the money, right? Because you know that I'm right". Which sounds really arrogant but it was the argument that, what you're funding is artists and what your funding is a process and what you're funding is us to make work in a way that we make which looks expensive against other things but that's just because there are some companies and some other people with set systems and structures that you [the AC] understand and get.

JM: Yeah

JS: But we can't pretend, because that's not how art is made, that it all fits into one thing.

JM: So, similar to the corporate experience then of changing titles and talking to people in that way, is it the case that the Arts Council is saying one thing or they're asking for one thing but the reality of that structure happens through people and, if you can get the people on board and get the people understanding, there's wiggle room within the confines of what they're saying?

JS: No, I think Arts Council, my experience of Arts Council, was that they're very clear, very good at – because they have a responsibility as well – and there is an argument that they have to make to DCMS so that they can keep giving and we've seen a much lighter touch in that Arts Council budget than in lots of other departments, so they have to be able to make a political case to the politicians, to the treasury. So, DCMS can go to treasury and go "keep giving us this money". There's that famous story of Gerry Robinson when he was chair who was tight with Tony Blair and apparently, the story is, you know, he's in the office and his response was "just give them the fucking money. It's not even a lot of money. Just give them the fucking money". But Arts Council have to report back on that.

JM: Yeah

JS: My experience is that they do want to get it to the artist, that they do want to support these organisations but they have to make everyone feel secure with that. So even though, I would say that the smart companies, artists, are the ones that would then be able to report, present and talk to Arts Council reps in the way that they need to be able to made to feel secure. Because once you've

got the money and as long as you deliver on what you said that you were going to do, and you've accepted that the conditions of taking the public money are *this* and we have to deliver on that, but then there's a whole load of stuff that that unlocks as well or additionally. And, you know, you're only looking at a percentage of your income as an organisation coming from Arts Council. But the huge privilege that brings, certainly for us as an organisation, is that it allows us to, basically, run as a company without having to worry about cash flow, you know? We make sure it works.

JM: Yeah, but it's enough that you can keep the lights,

JS: Yeah. And 60% of our income isn't Arts Council. We can do whatever the fuck we want. In that, it's sort of leverage, if that makes sense?

JM: Yeah. So, is that, is that number shrinking over time? Do you ever imagine a point where you will be sustainable without any kind of Arts Council funding? Or is it just part of the model at the moment?

JS: We could be.

JM: Yeah

JS: But that's the point at which I go away and, you know, go and ask Colin about that thing "you know where you said if we did anything else we could make loads of money, what is that?" Because there's a point, contributed income is vital because that is the business model and it's interesting, I always think, it's something that Arts Council, in all the reports, this happens to every organisation, the high-risk part of it is if you take away our contribution then you become unsustainable as an organisation. Well, yeah? That's the deal. The way that we're able to behave and work as artists is because there is this contributed income. But look at the effect and impact that it has. And look at what it allows us to do and the experiences it enables us to create. And we can't do that, otherwise we turn into a production company, and instead of thinking about "what's the best way for us to do this with audiences, how do we keep prices down, how do we make this free for people to attend?", it becomes about..... You have to have a conversation, and this is where we had to change. With the corporate work, it just became the thing that we were doing because it takes up so much of your time and then we had to go "the thing is, there's no point us doing this because this is now our job", and if we're going to do it we might as well make a ton of money off it.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

JS: At the moment, we're just, we're doing 30% art and 70% this other work and that's not what we want to do. So, yeah, there's a point at which you become a production company but it becomes about bottom lines and it would be very different. And we could do but that that point I might as well.....

JM: Do something else

JS: Yeah. Fuck I don't know what it would be. Become an astronaut. That's what I'd do.

JM: That's the dream? It's not a bad idea.

JS: No, I'd rather..... It's a beautiful day today, I started playing tennis 3 years ago and I wish I'd done it 20 years ago then I could maybe, I could be a tennis coach and teach kids how to play tennis.

JM: So, with the, just talking about kids, was it fairly early on as a group that you started discussing and focusing on, reaching out to both kids and adults with your work. From what I've read there seems to be, not a divide, but certainly there's.... Grown up theatre and there's kids theatre..... And there seems to be a lot of concern and back and forth in reviews I've read that talk about how people often see making theatre for children or theatre for younger audiences.... Basically, how do you avoid talking down to people? You're one of the few companies I've found where you seem to do it well. In that, you have an adult audience and a child audience and you're getting positive reactions from both. So, I'm just wondering, is that like a conscious choice to do both or was it that you were just making the work you were interested in and then the people came to you?

JS: It's something we've always been interested in, which came about because [inaudible].... And it was a way of making work where you could get paid as well, so a case could be made for that. But we've always worked with that 7-11 age group in particular, mainly because that's the time to inspire and capture people's imaginations. I mean everyone in any industry, anyone who is anything will generally say something about an experience that happened to them by the age of ten, before they were 10. Which was the thing that made them want to do the thing that they wanted to do. It's also a brilliant age. The kids at that age are smart, they're engaged, primary education has generally got smaller class sizes. This was always, when we started out working in schools, and you're preparing these beautiful young minds for the potential that they are.... Or helping to, being part of something, to become a contributing human beings and adults that they have the potential to be in the future. And it was fun. You've got kids, people that will listen to you. And also, they play, at that age they're really good at playing but, also, making and contributing. So, it's my experience, it's the best age to be working with. So that was always something that we did, for those reasons but also because we could make work that would create income for us that would then allow us to make the other work as well. So it wasn't that we were doing it for that reason. We want to do this *and* we can generate income from it which would allow us.... Which is one of the only ways for us to create opportunities for us to make the other work that we also want to make. So while we're making that inspirational work about being good human beings, about the concerns that 7-11 year olds have. We're also making shows that are dark as fuck for adult audiences in the vein of Eastern European companies that were influencing us at the time and touring both of them. And we did that for a long time and then that turned into more, bigger, ongoing projects that was about..... In Leeds certainly, a really, we had, I can't remember what they were called. Everyone changes all their names and they don't exist anymore. There was an artists into schools programme so there was real value..... And you talk about the backdrop of the Labour government,

JM: Yeah, yeah.

JS: I remember very clearly. In 1997, when we started out, everyone, in primary schools wanted workshops or projects about bullying, anti-bullying. Because of what the Labour government, its policies, its attitudes, the legislation it introduced by 2002 there was no more bullying. Basically, bullying in primary schools had stopped. Because the values of the time mean that of course we're not going to hit the kids and of course we're going to call it out and we've got structures and systems in place which..... So we got to start making new projects that were about other things and being

creative and inspiring people and doing residencies with schools where we would create fictional environment for the kids in the school and the teachers to play in. Particularly in quite deprived areas in Leeds where you just don't get that sort of stuff. That also turned into, through a relationship with studio theatre at Leeds Metropolitan University which is now Leeds Beckett, a programme of work which was through, what was called at the time, Aim Higher, which was looking at kids who had the potential to go beyond the curriculum and achieved more... It was about bringing devised theatre practice into the teaching. So, teachers very nervous about teaching their devised theatre module, we ran a big programme of work for a few years, which was at a GCSE level, and it was for both the students and the teachers, to give teachers confidence in teaching that. So we would run a big programme of work, loads of schools in Leeds, all the teachers and after a few years the outcome for that was we feel more confident and are better at teaching those modules. We understand what that non-mainstream approach to making theatre is, we know where to find it in this city. So that was important to us as well because it was about keeping that alive and well in the curriculum. And then we all started having kids. It became very apparent, certainly I'm particular, was just very frustrated with how much shit there was and I wanted to go to and do things with my kids.... So, the thing is I'm going to have to make it then, aren't I. Which sounds, again, really arrogant and there are, what I have found is.... I don't really buy into, I think there's a huge amount of brilliant work that's made for children, for families, for young audiences.

JM: Yes

JS: By incredibly dedicate artists who have had this as a practice for a very long time.

JM: Yep

JS: It's just that where you don't see it is in the theatres because the theatres are programmed awfully, for the best part. You can see Peppa Pig but that makes me want to hurt people and that's not the human being I want to be.

JM: Yeah

JS: Stuff that's really good you have to hunt it out a bit and find out all the places..... And we started making that work because I was having kids but also because we'd started working and collaborating with scientists, which is again just something about working with different people from different sectors and being interested in interesting things but also about recognising that that became a really good business model that we weren't only reliant on the arts sector for parts and therefore financial support. We could work with other people and bring in really interesting people and make work, new audiences and new streams of funding to make that work and other brilliant people. At the time, it was John Lloyd, Artistic director of the Polka Theatre, was wanting to make, which is a children's theatre in Wimbledon, was wanting to making work with artists for children with artists that were primarily making work for adult audiences and he knew that.... He wanted to make a show about science to inspire the kids about science and he knew we working with scientists. He'd seen our science show for adult audiences and he said "do you want to make one for kids?" "You want to give me money to make a show?" At the time, yeah and I can make it for my kids. And since then, which was in 2010, it's become a really staple part of what we do now. I've sort of tracked my kids growing up but it's also led us now increasingly making work outdoors. Lots more work with galleries, museum, festivals rather than theatres.

JM: And with that change of space do you feel that people are more comfortable because they're closer to home or they're safer in an "I know how to behave here" sense. My experience as a kid was that theatres were always very intimidating spaces. Quite different, not what you would do normally.

JS: They're fucking weird, Joe. In the year 2017, the number of them that are still run in the ways that are that weird is extraordinary to me. Particularly when I can't see how the theatres, those buildings are going to survive. They don't behave in ways that people behave.

JM: Do you see it then, in the same way that the mixed economy model is going, do you see all functioning theatre companies or progressive theatre companies going in the same way? So, they're moving out of spaces, they're collaborating with more people, there's overlap so that theatre as a "pure" form (if we want to call it that) would disappear eventually or is disappearing daily.

JS: I don't know what pure theatre is. But, you know, performance, live performance has always been live and it's always happened in lots of places, it's always happened outdoors, it's always been part of our culture and it's only in the last 100-150 years when it's been locked away into these rarefied cultural buildings.

JM: yeah, yeah

JS: They say this is where you come to do it. I don't think that's.... It's an industry that's protecting itself and it's not the funders who are doing it, it's all the people who are in there. It's the Oxbridge graduates who come out that are the same people that run all the same buildings, same organisations and give each other all the same jobs that are making work for themselves and not for audiences. They're making work that their colleagues, peers can go "that was an excellent piece of theatre".

JM: Yeah. But it's safe and it's controlled and limited.

JS: Uh... It's just not interesting to a lot of people and I think that's the thing that's weird that a lot of people haven't hooked onto, to me. You don't.... If people are being honest, theatre is a really niche activity. Most people don't go to the theatre. A lot of people will go to street arts, festivals because it's in the place that they live. A lot of people will go to, increasingly music festivals are now arts festivals. A lot of people will go to the science museum. One of the things that I do, beyond Unlimited is write and direct the Christmas show on the CBeebies channel for the BBC. That's a show that we do four performances of, so there's maybe 4,000 people see it live but a million people see it on the telly.

JM: Yep

JS: And next year we're making a show outdoors with Phoenix Dance Theatre in Leeds, for the streets of Leeds. We're making a show this summer that's been commissioned by the Without Walls Consortium. We'll still make work in theatre. I love the control that you get of the show and the piece and what you can achieve in there. But we have to, what we do differently there is work with the people that we want to work with and not, probably, those big buildings because it's too difficult to work with them most of the time and we also always bring our own audience. And that's not an Unlimited audience, that's an audience for this show. Some companies like Kneehigh or Gecko,

basically you're going to get the same show every time. You could follow them, and that's not a criticism. They're always good and they are different but you know what you're going to get when you go to see them. So, you can build an audience that travels with Gecko or with Kneehigh. Whereas for us we've always been interested in, not whether or not anyone knows who we are, but the thing that I love is that I could be having a conversation with someone I meet who said "Oh! I saw Neutrino 15 years ago" "Great". That's one of my favourite things ever, they don't need to know who I was or who the company is and every time we're bringing a new audience to the shows because they're always different.

JM: Okay then. Yeah. That's interesting because, I suppose from a business model perspective, you'd want a certain level of audience retention. So, do you have any way of gauging overlap between shows or do you think there are markedly different people genuinely each time?

JS: I don't believe that you do necessarily need to retain your audience. Particularly, we're a small company.... Actually, I think this is wrong, I think it's why theatre's going to die. The West Yorkshire Playhouse, for example, is obsessed with retaining its core audience. It's core audience is literally dying.

JM: Yeah

JS: And they're not doing enough.... They shouldn't be going.... I mean, how boring is it? You look at the programme and it's the same shows. I mean it's Grapes of Wrath rather than Of Mice and Men, it's The Graduate rather than whatever last years inspired by a film was. But, you're wanting the same audience to come again and again and I don't believe that that's sustainable. We've done a lot of work with, so a friend of mine, Matt Locke, who runs a company called Story Things, who we met and we did a project with him at what was Kirklee's Media Centre at the time. But we did, he talks about it being, it might have been, I don't know, the first theatre show using SMS. So, it was, like, 99 and we just wrote a version of the show that you could receive by text message. And it wasn't easy, it was proper bricks.

JM: Old Nokias

JS: Anyway, yeah yeah, and we've worked with him since because that was a way of reaching a new audience using, at the time, new technologies. But it was fucking expensive to send text messages, to programme something that would basically embargo messages that you would get. But people loved it. And he talks very clearly, he's one of those.... He went on to be a Commissioning Editor at Channel 4, his company now is basically a consultancy company making content for a medium .com. And he talks about how attention works. I mean, you'll know this. So, for example, if you were The Who in the 70s, you could release a record and for 10 years you could be... You could have records that were selling at the top of the charts. But there's maybe like 10 of those bands. You can't be The Who anymore because of the attention span. So, if you look at the way that all the releases are happening, with Drake releasing mixtapes rather than albums. What the fuck is a mix tape and not an album, you have to know that. It's the constant steady release of stuff if you want to stay in that high. But if you're Metronomy then you're going to have.... Your core base is going to be really interested but your record company is going to go hell for leather in the release weeks to sell as many vinyl copies and get the attention there but that's going to last a couple of weeks, months and, then, when you release an album 2 years later no one would pay any attention to you. Whereas that

would never happen with The Who. The Who were always there. So actually, you've got a small core base but every time I think you're bringing a new audience to the show, particularly for us because each show is really different. The last big thing, I can't remember what we've just done.... Oh no.... SO, *Am I Dead Yet?* is a studio touring theatre show. It's me and Chris and it's about death and dying and there's some people who come because it's me and Chris and because it's Unlimited. A lot of the people who come to that are coming because it's about death and dying. And we're doing it in lots of different places. We didn't do it in the playhouse in Leeds. We did four dates, four nights, four consecutive nights in Leeds so new people are coming to it. And that really works. It sold out every night. Whereas having to try and sell out the fucking playhouse over four nights is a real pain in the arse. It's real hard and a battle. It's more expensive. They've got to sort out childcare if they've got kids. They've got to come into town, they've got to park, then you've got to pay more money than you would ideally want to and a fucking booking fee on top of it. Not many people want to do that or can afford to do that. So then, that's got that audience. We've got this free show that's going out to all the festivals in the summer, which is a touring version of *My Garden Shed*. That is for family audiences. Basically, it's got no swears in it so it's for family audiences and it's not about death and dying. And we're making a show about human enhancement, with RashDash, that will happen in theatres and that will be a whole new audience again. We'll have that small core audience. Both us and RashDash will bring our lot to it and there'll be a certain industry thing which will be "oh it's this company that do that so even if you've not heard of them, you've heard of them a little bit", you go "alright, they're saying that's good and I'll come to that". But no one reads Lynn Gardeners blog. There's maybe a couple of thousand people who read them but that's not going to sell your show. You have to get out and find people that are interested in *this* subject, about this thing right now. Why is this of interest right now and, also, who are your audience? Being clear on that. Our audience are 7-11 year olds and their teachers. Our audience are anyone aged 7+, mostly in family settings. Our audience is that 14-35 age group that want to come and see two middle aged men in their pants dancing to Motley crew. And also, the work can be made in response to those things. So, we have made a show, a little while ago, which was a response to a commissioner, Artistic Director at a building, who said "you came here with a show, about four years ago and it did really well, sold out all that sort of stuff. But that audience that came have never been back. We want you to make another show and bring that audience back." Well, we don't know who they are and, also, we're older.

JM: Yeah, you're going to be thinking about different things or dealing with different things.

JS: And we talked about, so who do you understand those people to be and why do you want them to be coming in? And at the time, it was all about the Scandi dramas, *The Killing*, *The Bridge*, so we said let's make a thriller.

JM: Yeah

JS: And make it look like....

JM: A Scandi one

JS: A Scandi drama. So, all the promo stuff, we made it look like a boxset and then it has that attitude to it and it has the twists and it has that production value sheen to it.

JM: Yeah, everyone's got jumpers

JS: [laughter] probably. But the story, you know, I'm really happy allowing the story to be effective so long as we continue to make something that's genuinely really good, interesting and has something important to people right now.

JM: Yeah

JS: I don't mind a bit of showbiz.

JM: Fair enough. Great. So, I think that's pretty much everything there because we've covered....

JS: Sorry I went on one a little bit.

JM: No, no. It's good. We've covered the money, we've covered audiences and we've covered quality so those are the 3 areas that the thesis is looking into. Two of those, access and quality are Arts Council and then the money is behind it all, making it happen, obviously. So, like I say, I was just interested in your experiences of it and it's nice to get a honest, I suppose, take. A lot of the times, not that people are lying to me, but there's been a certain level of this is how it works, whereas it was refreshing to get a you have to make compromises and you have to do things in certain ways and that sort of stuff which was great. The next step for me, then, I'm going to write this up and I can send you a transcript, likely by the weekend, and then if you want to make any amendments or suggest any changes, little bits and pieces, anything as small as taking bits out to as big as changing what you think, just let me know and I'm happy to make certain amendments to the script. And what will happen then is little bits and pieces will be taken and put into chapters, that's the aim. Do you have any questions for me at all, anything you'd like clarity on?

JS: I don't think so. Obviously, if anything is going to get published, I'd hope that you'd share anything where you reference or quote me because it would be nice to make sure that, if anything's published, that the context for it is right.

JM: Yeah, absolutely. So that, what will happen is once it's written up and drafted in the actual chapter and it's got to a point that I'm happy with it, I'll send you the drafts of that and then at that point if there's anything that you want to amend or contribute to just let me know again and we'll take it from there.

JS: Thanks. And what stage are you at? How far away are you from publishing?

JM: So, it's submitting.... Long story short, I had submitted in September 2015, had a viva in December 2015 but because my supervisor at that point was negligent I just got torn to shreds in the viva. So, from January 2016, I've been amending and fixing everything with a view to submitting the beginning of August. So, we're about 3 months out, maybe 3 and a half months out. But part of the big issues was that, in the first draft, I developed these theoretical models. So, "here's how I think things work" and, as I was developing them, I asked the supervisor at the time do I need to get evidence of this or demonstrations of this and he suggested that it was fine, it's a theoretical text, you can describe it as a philosophical exercise. Apparently, you can't [laughter]. So, I got shredded and as part of that shredding they made clear that I need to be more.... There's no point saying that you think this thing is happening unless you can talk or demonstrate, one way or the other, the

extent to which it is. And so, part of the interview process now is getting ground's eye, first hand, grassroots perspective that connects here's what they're [the Arts Council] talking about as an organisation and a government and here's our experience as arts makers. So that now, I've got all my ideas, I'm just compiling and testing them against evidence that I'm folding into the written drafts. Then in the process of that changing my ideas, to a degree, because the more people I talk to the more my ideas develop and shift a bit. But, yeah, so that's where we are.

JS: Okay cool, well if there were other people, three other people that I would recommend you speak to, that I can connect you with, would be Mark Hollander, who I spoke about, who was our Drama Officer at Arts Council

JM: Yep

JS: And then came to work with us and was an Exec Director and is now at Phoenix. He is really smart and would have a really interesting line on it from an Arts Council perspective and, then, working outside. It was interesting seeing him coming into us and talking about.... We were talking about reporting to Arts Council and I said, "we're not going to tell them that, Mark" "really?" "did you really not know we were doing that?". Also, Dawn Walton who's currently the Artistic Director of Eclipse Theatre at Sheffield but was also, before that, at the National Theatre Studio and is brilliant. And also, Kully Thiari who's currently the Artistic Director of the National Theatre of Wales but has come through a whole bunch of places. Oh, and also, Madani Younis at The Bush who is super smart, very honest also an excellent politician and came through a little bit later than us but certainly.... Came through Red Ladder in Leeds and then set up Freedom Studios in Bradford and has gone onto The Bush. He's got good experiences of stuff and I know that you'll have stuff lined up but I think that might be a bit more interesting than Pilot, if you're talking to Marcus, I guess.

JM: Yep

JS: There's other more interesting people that.... You might find that Marcus has one of those lines that will be very much his.... I don't know.... Anyway.... There's those people there, I've just messaged you them and if you did want to connect with them or if you didn't know how to get in touch with them then I can help with that.

JM: That's great, thank you. I'll.... I'm sure I can track them down on the internet and if I can't, I'll get back in touch. But thank you that's really, really helpful.

JS: It's an interesting thing and I hope that you have a less negligent supervisor this time.

JM: Yeah. They're better. It sounds stupid but at a really simple level the new one gives me paper copies of drafts that she's written on so I know that she's actually read it. Whereas previously it was like "yeah, it's really good" as they scrolled through it on an iPad, so it was just like "great". But, no, thank you. 3 months out, I'm not really leaving the house. Pretty much me tied to the desk.

JS: Well, take care of yourself. I know too many people who have got to this stage.... It's like a marathon, right? You both love it and hate it

JM: Yeah, there's something about that and, inevitably, everyone on the course seems to have taken up some sort of really abusive physical exercise because there must be something in the mindset of "I enjoy punishing myself". So, I'm doing this and running and that's about it.

JS: At least you're doing the running though

JM: Yeah, yeah. Just to get away from computers for an hour or two a day. Just to clear your head because I'm not very co-ordinated. I'm not good at team sports so I can't do football or tennis or anything like that because I'd just miss stuff.

JS: Yeah, I do a bit a running, I think.... Sorry, I've just spotted the.... Realised I should go

JM: Okay.

JS: It's really nice to meet you Joe

JM: And you Jon

JS: Look forward to hearing from you again

JM: Thank you ever so much, I'll send you some stuff through as soon as I've done it. Have a good day

JS: And you

JM: Cheers now, bye bye.

**Transcript of Interview with Mark Hollander, Theatre Officer, Acting Director of Performing Arts,
and Senior Manager of Funding Programmes 2001-2013**

15/05/17

MH: [inaudible due to mic set up] So, I found the Joe McLoughlin that said Liverpool so I tried that, but presumably you didn't get it so it must have been another one.

JM: No, I'm based in the Midlands so presumably there's somebody up in Liverpool who's....

MH: It's the only thing.... Because of the university.... Is it Liverpool University that you're at?

JM: No, so I'm operating out of Holloway down in Egham.

MH: Oh right, okay. Completely wrong. Must be confusing you with someone else.

JM: No problem. Just so I know from the outset, you said you've got about half an hour today, is that right?

MH: Yeah, it would be good if we can keep it to that but, you know, give or take if we're in the middle of something.

JM: Yeah, no problem, generally how this has worked in the past we'd go through the ethical stuff to begin with which is all fairly straight forward. So just to let you know, I am recording this today and I will be making a transcript of it and then what I'll do is email you a copy of the transcript. You've got time then to make any amendments or changes and they can be as little as taking "ums" and "ahs" out to as big as saying "I've rethought this" and "I've rethought that". Just so that's clear and okay for you. And then the other one, of course, is that I approached you, you're happy to talk to me, there's no coercion or anything going on anywhere along the line.

MH: Yep, that's all fine.

JM: Great

MH: What would be good, if you can just remind me, so I can get my head in the right place, of the broad area.

JM: Yeah, certainly. So, my project is looking at the first ten years of Labour from about.... When they took office in 97 and said, you know, "arts and culture are central to us, they're an important part of what hold us together as a society, we're not like the Tories in that regard so we're going to put a lot of money and effort and energy into these things" And then, flashing forward ten years to about 2008, where you've had lots more investment, lots more DCMS interest and the rise of that claim of instrumentalism through to the McMaster review and that claim of "It's gone too far, we need to bring excellence back" and then also looking at how expectations of what was expected of arts organisations and theatre companies that took the money. So that I'm broadly looking at how foundational arts Council goals like access and excellence were articulated explored in the period and then looking at how the money worked behind all of that.

MH: Okay, very broad then, fine.

JM: If that makes sense?

MH: It all makes sense. I'll do my best to feed into that and we'll see....

JM: Great, generally how this has worked before is that interviews tend to begin, I've got a few questions here, but they tend to begin with a rundown of your experiences of working for the Arts Council, your title, your day to day activities. That sort of thing.

MH: Just the Arts Council? Not my broad.... you know I don't work there at the moment?

JM: Yes, yeah. So, you were there from 2001 to 2013, I've got here. Is that about right?

MH: That's right, spot on, yeah. So, sorry, what was it, my titles and responsibilities?

JM: Yeah and just what your day to day life would look like during your time there. I know it's a broad question but roughly....

MH: [laughter] That's alright, no problems. I had different roles as the Arts Council. I joined as the Theatre Officer in 2001 and spent probably eight years in that role. I then was Acting Director of Performing Arts for a short while and then through one of many restructures I became Senior Manager of Funding Programmes. The Director of Performing Arts Role went when they restructured all the roles so my last post there was Senior Manager Funding Programmes.

JM: Yep

MH: All of those areas have slightly different remits. The substantial work over those eight years.... I was employed initially for two years, on short term contract (which is what I wanted), to implement The Theatre Review [Boyden] (which I suspect you'll be familiar with as you referenced the McMaster report) and then implement that for the Yorkshire region. I decided to stay on so my role at that point was quite focused on that additional £25 million for theatre and I had a portfolio of about 15 arts organisations in the Yorkshire region from all the producing theatres to a range of touring companies. As I stayed on beyond those first two years I kept that portfolio and I was quite instrumental in helping develop thinking strategy around any given spending review and our investment strategy. I began to lead on capital programmes and I took the lead on two major capital developments in Yorkshire: Hull Truck and Sheffield Theatres [Crucible]. Then, at some point, I became acting Director of the Performing Arts which was then, stepping away from that Officer Role (which had become a Relationship Manager role), and I managed a team of maybe 6 or 7 arts specialists. So that was a broader brief and I maintained that strategic role, in fact, I was given a strategic role on capital, for the region, the North Area actually then as we became area focused. Then, fairly shortly after, we went through another restructure and my final post, Senior Manager Funding Programmes, was kind of what it says on the tin. I implemented most of the funding programmes that Arts Council delivered and helped shape the new relationship framework for the Arts Council Relationship managers, bit of policy work and a bit of work on resilience in organisations.

JM: Yeah

MH: That's it. Too long?

JM: No, that's lovely. Thank you. I came to you, or found you through Jon Spooner over at Unlimited and he said that for a while there you were their relationship manager.

MH: Right

JM: And that worked very well, he felt, and so I was wondering if you could sum up how you supported them, I suppose, in that capacity as a hands-on relationship manager [drama officer] before you take that step-up almost to the overview position.

MH: Yeah. I mean, well, Unlimited, like all the companies in my portfolio.... I came from a background of having worked within the sector directly as a practitioner, an actor, director, sometime writer. So, I never saw a separation between the funding system and arts practice so I guess that was the position I adopted.

JM: Yep

MH: So, my relationship with Unlimited, they were a company who when I was a performer I probably would have wanted to work with. I was from a devising background, a new writing background, physical theatre. So, I felt.... I used my experience to try and form a, you know, a creative relationship as well as a transactional relationship.

JM: Yep

MH: I always felt that that was important in those roles and so I suppose over and above just attending board meetings, delivering their funding, looking at their funding, all that stuff. I'd meet them as often as I could and if they wanted it I'd help discuss their plans more broadly. You know, the nature of their work, where their work is positioned in the sector, how it looks and sits against other kinds of work. So, I think, I'm not claiming anything special in the relationship, but I think maybe where I did differ from some Officers at that point was.... I felt my role was to use the Treasury money to deliver as best it can their aims, a bit like being the Executive Director of a company, the goal is to liberate the art.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

MH: And I didn't really want to see Arts Council as trying to put up barriers to receiving money. I wanted to see how we could between us meet their aspirations. That was my position and we just happened to get on very well.

JM: Yeah. So, it's about then, if I'm understanding you correctly, it's about taking what Treasury expects or what Treasury wants and then using that to best facilitate the best art that you can?

MH: Yeah because Treasury, you know, the priorities that come from Arts Council from the government, you look at them at face value and there's a degree to which everyone sort of feels pressured to deliver *all* those aims and aspirations. And of course, you can't. And there's a certain sense where we all become slightly homogenous and it's like you have to deliver in the same way. And of course, that's not true. Nobody would want that. We want a vibrant, mixed portfolio that delivers those aims collectively in different ways. So, I suppose I felt that there were different ways to articulate how companies deliver those aims and that was one of my roles as I saw it. Not to try

and force companies to do things differently to align with priorities but [to consider] how we can interpret what they do against those priorities. If that's an impossible task then that's a problem.

JM: Yes

MH: But more often than not, it's about the articulation of that work against those priorities rather than redefining the company in order to squeeze itself into Arts Council and Treasury priorities.

JM: Yes, yeah. So, you felt that there was that wiggle room or that space for negotiation almost?

MH: In my view, plenty. The challenges tend to come, when you hit a challenge, was where the Arts Council was under pressure with its diversity strategy and companies felt that pressure and they didn't have the experience or the know how to, necessarily, recognise what they did in that field or that area of work. I think that was another area where I thought I could help, you know, consider that agenda broadly and hopefully take that breathless pressure off of people to feel that they just had to change the world instantly on their own.

JM: Okay, great. On that money, it's an interesting one, a lot of the criticism and a lot of the critical, academic, reflective stuff that I've read makes a big, big point of the marketisation and the push for profit motive and the emphasis in the Green Book, amongst other things, of cost/benefit and a very basic understanding of why we pay for the art we pay for, with a view that it always gives something back. So, it's refreshing to hear that within that set up there was a bit of wiggle room or there was a bit of negotiation because, like you say, otherwise it becomes almost untenable or near impossible.

MH: I think so, and I think the cost/benefit argument across the piste, the arguments been made clear. The economic studies have been done and we still live on that "£2 for every £1 invested", I mean it must have changed by now, I suspect, but that was always the figure bandied around for many years.

JM: Yeah

MH: The Creative Industries Federation now is identifying much stronger, more detailed articulation of the creative industries (in which the arts sits) so, to a certain extent, I think that's the job of funders to play to..... To express that and it's the job of artists at moments to help Arts Council express that but, largely, the job of artists is to make art.

JM: Yeah, yeah

MH: And so, I think if you're comfortable that the sector as a whole is a successful sector, and I think we probably won that argument, and it was kind of becoming obvious when I was at the Arts Council that we weren't stripping the economy, then I think you have the comfort to allow that to happen when necessary in those political circles and hopefully infuse the sector with brilliant art. It would then get caught up again in that, I think you alluded to it, that instrumental versus.... What's the other one?

JM: Intrinsic

MH: Intrinsic value of the arts. I think we all got a bit hung up on the pendulum swinging between those two ends of the spectrum. Those things unsettle the sector quite a lot and just when you've

found the wiggle room in one area, with the needle pointing towards intrinsic value you're told you have to swing it across.

JM: There's a shift, yeah. Going on to talk about that then, thinking about excellence as one side of it. So, it's always pitched as excellence and access and their either totally opposite and you can do one or the other or you can simultaneously do both at the same time. And what I find really interesting is that in the official line of dialogue there's loads of instrumentalism and then in about 2004 and 2005 Tessa Jowell starts talking about how "we've gone too far and we've forgotten the core value [of art] both as a government and as an arts body" and then it works up to the McMaster Review [2007/08] where he brings excellence back or suggests to bring excellence back. But then, of course, he pitches that in 2008 and then, of course, the recession happens and then the election happens so that this big trumpet call almost doesn't amount to much. But more interestingly to me, I find it odd that.... Regardless of any push for instrumentalism, I find it odd that any arts body could genuinely forget, you know what I mean, or ignore excellence as a part of what it's doing.

MH: Yes, completely. Of course, companies never do because that's what they're there for and, you know, within their own camera lens they see what they do as excellent. That may not always be.... There's disagreements as to what constitutes excellence.... But I completely agree, one was never at the expense of another and I suppose that thing about along came the crash and undermined that whole 2008 drive, I mean that was the same with the theatre review. The Theatre Review [Boyden report] was an injection of cash that brought a whole lot of confidence to the theatre sector for about 5 minutes and then, you know, Equity formed a new settlement for Equity wages, utility costs started to go up, we needed to be better administrators in arts organisations, we needed to run them better so a lot of that additional cash that should have gone on the arts was, either, going into a hole that we'd built up over many years of poorly run organisations.

JM: Yeah

MH: Or it just went on increased costs. So, I think that there's always been that cycle of money being released for greater art and then being sucked into costs and I think the crash, the crash obviously compounded that. Standstill funding, I suppose, has been the main challenge for organisations since that point.

JM: Most recently, yeah. It sounds peculiar but it's almost like a test, if you've been building up organisations for 10 years with stabilisations money and helping them develop as better businesses it then becomes almost an acid tests if you, say, start taking away large swathes of public support and then you *have to* operate as businesses but that's a, you know what I mean, that's a different period.

MH: Yeah, yeah. I suppose the other thing... Remind me what years you're covering.

JM: Broadly 1997 to 2008

MH: Yeah, so 2001 when I came into the picture.... There'd been years of, for those Thatcher years, very administratively heavy organisations, that was kind of loosened up. Through the theatre review and I think this translated across artform, not just theatre, there was this notion of risk versus stability, structural stability. The Arts Council wanted organisations to take creative risks after years of the pot going a little bit dry but at the same time was emphasising infrastructural stability. If you

take that literally.... I think artists get it, I don't think boards do. Boards will always fall on the side of infrastructural stability

JM: Yeah, let's be stable.

MH: In some ways that's their job and, so, I don't think we've ever quite got out of that. We've got snips of it occasionally but I think the constant undermining of subsidy or the deterioration of subsidy and, of course, we see the effects of that in programming choices and venues and so forth and where we are now. But that's been an attritional effect for decades

JM: So, just getting back to that question of quality, then. Obviously, there's no blue print for it in that you don't have a 5 or 6-point checklist so I'm just curious as to how you negotiate that issue with arts organisations. IN the sense that, how do you.... You go and see work in development, you talk to artists and then in turn you take that back and you talk amongst yourselves to make informed decisions. I suppose what I'm getting at is that the "access" agenda seems much easier to measure as opposed to excellence which, by its nature almost, is an elusive, changing thing.

MH: I think.... I think when I first worked at the Arts Council it was an impossible thing to measure and it's still a kind of impossible thing to measure. I know we've got metrics now but we'll see. There was a lot of inconsistency about how staff at the Arts Council and Officers articulated quality and excellence and how it was debated. There was a lot of individual, character-driven approaches to that.

JM: Hmmm

MH: The longer I stayed and think certainly through the change of all the open access funds into one platform, the Grants for the Arts, and the range of statuaries that went alongside that, the relationship framework, I think it was expressed much better by the Arts Council that we look at quality, or we looked at quality, through self-evaluation and what organisations say about themselves, through audience response, press response, all that external attention, through.... They started obviously, what do they call it, the reporting process where independent other artists would give show reports, all these ingredients of the programming and then at some point also the observation of any given officer and how they see that organisation in any given sector.

JM: Yeah, yeah

MH: I'm not sure you can do much more than that other than take what you're given in all those areas. It's sort of, more handed over to the companies at that point, to tell us how they measure quality and therefore, when you sit back and look at the bigger picture, whether it kind of looks broadly okay. And, of course, taste can never be a part of that. I suppose for some individuals that's the hardest thing. I have to say that Arts Council did pretty well on that. It didn't feel good when I first arrived but it felt like they got a grip of it quite well.

JM: So, I suppose then with quality, it's not that abstract notion of one person standing in front of a painting almost, it's that you take as much information as you can and then somehow try and mediate that and the distil it almost.

MH: Well yeah, I mean you can never distil it and I don't think there's ever a need to.... I don't think it's about coming up with "it's great art, it's not great art". I think it's whether that combined with the other aspects around resilience, sustainability and diversity broadly give comfort because if you took too literal a view on what quality was.... You can see every three or four years when there's a portfolio review or as we have now an NPO application, we're not replacing 80, 100 organisations. There's not 80 to 100 waiting in the wings. Quality, really good quality work that aligns with the priorities of the Arts Council is quite hard to find, actually and then, around the edges, you have companies that come in and out but I'm not sure that you'd want to make the parameters too narrow or else you'd have no portfolio left.

JM: Yeah, okay. Interesting stuff. So, just, on the public access agenda, in terms of reaching out to new audiences but also diversifying the producer base, who's making the work I suppose. How influential was that issue on the ground level where you were working because, from my perspective, there's an awful lot of stats work and number crunching on, you know, we have 3% of growth here or 5% of cuts there or emphasis on this area or that area and certain initiative to address race or disability or those sorts of things. And I'm just curious, because you said before that organisations had difficulty meeting or responding to those pushes. What was it about that that people found difficult, I suppose? Is it that you're just starting with nothing or...?

MH: I think it took a long time for the debate to grow up within the funding system and move away from policy into.... The first shift was this action plan process that came out as a result of Eclipse which was theatre strategy combatting institutional racism in theatre. That evolved eventually into the action planning process for across the arts portfolio and I think what that did was, because that was called an action plan, people felt pressure to address.... Whatever the Arts Council said about the breadth of diversity, disability, social deprivation, I think the feeling was that it's always race – to a certain extent disability – but certainly in the early days it was about race. Even though we know.... In paperwork, it would say a broad spectrum of agendas. And so, I think people thought "what the hell can I do? I'm a three person, white, middle class small touring company, what can I do?" And I think it was as simple as that, an immediate sense of pressure and "oh we're going to lose our funding if we don't address this" and I just think people floundered. And I don't think at that point that people really knew that we should see the portfolio as a whole and how the portfolio as a whole was delivering on diversity rather than every company doing the same. Like the point I made earlier, we don't all deliver everything or in the same way. I think, with good advice, companies gradually felt less pressure. They just needed to do what they can do. Then I think that the creative case around diversity, in my view, was the best strategy that Arts Council has ever established. I think it just took the whole energy out of that carrot and stick, command and control type relationship.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

MH: And placed it back as a conversation in the sector. It took a while to jockey into position but I do feel that it was really helpful and still is helpful. So, I just think these things, they come-on stream as strategy and they come on a bit quick and they're built into funding agreements before anyone really knows what it means. It frightens some people.

JM: Yep. It's just that thing, I suppose, it's easy to say and everyone accepts it as a solid principle, it's just that challenge of doing it. I mean, even now, looking at recent stuff, there's still sort of wobbles around hitting targets almost and the follow up question of course is that, once you hit targets, you

don't box yourself in, so that you don't start setting up black arts organisations for black people or white arts organisations for white people. You know what I mean, that sense of not wanting diversity to become a tick box but to become a vibrant, natural developing process.

MJ: I think so and I think.... I don't think.... I think that was part of the resistance early on, some companies saying "well, we are diverse, we've always been open access, why do we have to do anything different?". And I don't think companies.... Setting targets for themselves made it a bit easier and, to be honest, I don't think anyone at the Arts Council ever said, "that's the wrong target".

JM: Yeah

MH: You know that "we have this notion of how many, what proportion of your board should be from ethnic minority backgrounds". It was never that specific. So, I think, it was just more it took time for a coming together of minds and we're not there, you're right, but I think there's a more sophisticated approach and I do think that your point about not boxing yourself in, I do think it's fluid. I don't see any reason why, it seems to me that it led to our ability to address diversity on any given year or two or three years.

JM: Yeah

MH: Those of us that, a company I work for now, which has a very clear black heritage, then clearly, we can deliver on that and we should do, but that's different from another company.

JM: Of course, and, so, flipping that over then in terms of appealing to audience, was there, when you were talking to organisations and coming to agreements on funding and applications and things, was there an awareness of the audience or was it that the belief in the artists and the work was so strong that the audiences would come?

MH: Phew. Blimey. By the way I'm quite happy to go beyond one o'clock

JM: [laughter] okay.

MH: I think that's a really tough one, it's almost a discussion in its own right. There have been so many years of audience development strategies, a lot of them driven out of the funding system, a lot of them not achieving anywhere close to what they set out to achieve or, if they did, did not sustain that with any given company or partnership of companies. My slightly, what's the word, unevicenced opinion was that, in the main, audience development initiatives often funded by the Arts Council didn't seem to be addressing in the longer term anything. The figures just weren't changing in terms of audience range, sometimes numbers you'd get a spike, but across the portfolio and in terms of what they set out to do they so often didn't succeed. So, there was a lot of attention to that and I think, again, a bit like the diversity agenda, the trend with Arts Council was to begin to move that back into the arts organisations. Beyond your time frame, but to the point where we all now have to develop audience development strategies as part of our funding agreement which we never used to. So, it's just placed it in a different place and it was one of the hardest things, I think, to get your head round as an Arts Council officer.

JM: Yeah. So, the thing I've found looking into access, during that period there was an awful lot of emphasis on *who*, who goes, how do we get different types of people in; young, old, black, white,

educated to a high degree or low degree, whatever. And what I found interesting was that even in the most likely groups, arts attendance wasn't particularly high and consistently, across all groups of people, the things they complained about, the things they said that stopped them going were the same. Issues of not feeling welcome, issues of not getting it, issues of transport, cost, time. All very practical things. So, what I find interesting looking into access is that the actual, the push for the access agenda I suppose has missed a trick in that, rather focus on *who's* doing it I would be inclined to look at *how* people are doing it, and that might be a different way of engaging or getting people interested.

MH: Yeah, and that was a big drive in the theatre review, was that theatre venues needed to be more like cinemas and actually offer an experience the minute you walk through the door. I think it's stated in the initial report that theatres don't offer that rounded experience. And actually, of course, the technical age has gone beyond that. There should be an experience before you get to the door.

JM: Yeah

MH: And so, I think that how is really important because if you don't have the how, you'll never have the who.

JM: Yes

MH: I think your points well made, I'd agree with that. I mean, I don't remember those arguments coming into quite such relief as discussion points within the Arts Council. That shift from AC separate regional bodies into the single Arts Council and then the subsequent *Great Art for Everyone*

JM: Yeah.

MH: That balance or tension, if you like, of Great Arts for Everyone, I think it's a brilliant message, everyone took ownership of it, it's taken ages to know what it means. It was that other thing of "does that mean that we all have to do fantastic work for everybody?" and so those other arguments [discussed above] start to unfold. So yeah, I've probably gone a little astray from your question.....

JM: No, no

MH: I think the point is that I'd agree. I think the ingredients..... It's like that quality; how do you assess quality? The ingredients are important. How do you assess whether people are reaching audiences? The ingredients are important. Are they using social media, are they welcoming, do you get a funny look when you walk through the wrong door in the theatre. All that stuff.

JM: Absolutely, so it seems that, in all cases, it comes back to this difference between outputs and outcomes, I suppose. In that, outputs is that quantifiable measurable bums on seats measure and that outcomes is the affect of what you're doing.

MH: I think so. It's so hard.... They join up. You don't get diversity without employing diverse people. So, whether employing diverse people is an output or an outcome, it's both isn't it.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

MH: It's an output in one document, one report, and it's an outcome in another.

JM: Yeah, yeah

MH: And we just have to work bloody hard to achieve those things and identify them ourselves as companies. And I think I always took that view when I was at the Arts Council. You simply knew the companies that were doing it right.

JM: Yep.

MH: And it's a horribly simplistic statement, following so many post-war decades of strategy. But that's the reality. Companies, either they do it right or they don't and, broadly, if they've positioned themselves in the right way and their values are right they will be meeting most agendas pretty well. And with a little bit of help a bit of correct strategy we can actually help them improve on that, build on that. I honestly think it's that sort of chemistry between boards.... My biggest gripe with arts organisations is old fashioned boards, and it's still my biggest gripe.

JM: Hmmm

MH: Because they're a barrier to very well intentioned and creative teams not being able to take creative risk and therefore forming the kind of partnerships and influences that they might need.

JM: Yep

MH: There's tensions all over the place. Does that make sense?

JM: It does, yes. Really, really good. How are you for time because I've just got one more....

MH: It's only self-imposed time, Joe, I've just got desk work but that's fine if there's a bit more.

JM: Alright, just one or two more. So, although I'm primarily focusing on that 97-2008 period, I'm curious as to.... Given the fact that you had three years under the new government, or the Coalition government, was there a marked change in expectation or the message coming down from on high, from the treasury? Or was it a sense of, you've had this great investment for ten years, then the recession happens, and then Labour to an extent scatters to deal with it but then the election changes everything and then there's a new agenda almost. So, I suppose what I'm getting at, was there a complete break in 2010 in terms of what was expected of the money that was given or was there just a continuation of this "hang about, we best draw back, tighten the purse strings a bit?"

MH: Well, actually, there was a lot of fear around and Jeremy Hunt was arts minister for a while and there was a lot of fear about his agendas and it all got a bit suspicious, a bit worried, money's going to tighten up. We haven't really made the case to this new incarnation of government and then, you'll know the time frame better than me, Peter Bazalgette was appointed as what looked like he might be there to be doing a hatchet job for the government.

JM: Yep

MH: And he didn't. He was what we all internally called a "friendly Tory" and he worked really well for us. And, actually, some quite good years of top level management for the Arts Council, some very good appointments and some good working in the corridors of power. I think he began to really

make the arguments, the economic arguments, for culture and the arts. And the money didn't seem to dry up. If it did it wasn't because of lack of intent from government. Loads of other opportunities came along through Gove, through education, The Education Hubs, all that stuff that although they were at that point nothing to do with the Arts Council, just gave the Arts Council this fantastic opportunity to take on, to be seen to be doing work a really good, modern non-government departmental body or whatever we're called.

JM: Yeah

MH: So, I think despite the fear we found ourselves thinking actually, well, the reality is we're still alive. The department, yeah, took its hit, the DCMS but then it sort of stabilised and they seemed to be quite friendly towards us.

JM: Yep

MH: That was my take on it. A few of the agendas changed. Bazalgette was brilliant on diversity but otherwise, no I don't think there was a feeling that.... I mean the most notable change was the Jeremy Hunt drive for resilience through corporate and private giving.

JM: Yeah

MH: That was the biggest problem that they delivered. You know that they.....

JM: Yeah, yeah, I think that 2011 was The Year of Corporate Giving or Corporate Philanthropy

MH: Probably, sounds about right

JM: So, they branded this initiative and it generated some cash but it didn't generate enough as it was pitched.

MH: And it still isn't. The only mitigating factor was that, and another good thing that was done by the Coalition government, was the theatre tax relief which I suppose, again we're all still nervous that's there to gradually wean us off state funding but, at the moment, it doesn't seem to be doing that it seems to be sitting alongside it and helping us bring back money into core. The trouble is, you rely on these things and then they go, with another government. So, you're constantly in tenterhooks as to what strategies gonna be around at any given minute.

JM: Yep

MH: And I suppose that was my.... It was a little bit my sense with that Tory led Coalition government, you didn't quite know if you could trust the strategies they were implementing. The philanthropic stuff just didn't seem to work but we were all being told to do it. Theatre tax relief was implemented, great. But how long was it going to last and are they going to cut Treasury money because of it. And, of course, lottery swings anyway in its own right.

JM: Yeah, yeah

MH: So, the residual effect of that is still around.

JM: Yes

MH: But having said that, I have to say that I think the arts did pretty well through the crash and through that government to hold on and keep most of its portfolio together.

JM: Yep, it seems that there's this sense of.... From everything I've read and people I've spoken to there's this sense of, post 97 and post investment, the arts are never going back in the box almost. The arts are never going to be dismissed by government, or they can't be dismissed by government again because they have moved so far over the last twenty, twenty-five years that the idea of going back to the seventies or eighties levels of.... It's literally a fraction of a percentage of a budget.... You know what I mean? The idea that.... You can't....

MH: I think so, yeah. Certainly, in the foreseeable future. This nation, if nothing else, is a culturally driven nation now. We have that world class reputation now and I think that any government would lose that at its peril. I think that's right, it's just what sort of arts, what sort of culture do we want to be known for. We're sort of a little bit stuck on the more commercially driven end, because of economic circumstances also, coupled with that, is the ripping out of arts in educational services. That's going to take its toll as well. So, I think there's a sort of chemistry that's going on in the longer term, but I think that your point is right. I don't think any government in the foreseeable future would want to rip out the subsidy. I don't think! Crikey!

JM: We'll see what happens after June

MH: Yeah

JM: I suppose that was.... 2010, that fear idea was a big one and he's quoted somewhere, Jeremy Hunt, giving an interview saying when he's Culture Secretary, if they're elected on the Thursday people aren't crying on the Friday. It's a quote along those lines so it's interesting to hear that, to an extent, they kind of actually achieved that.

MH: Yeah, I mean it didn't feel good when he was in post. He felt about as culturally engaged as.... Well, I won't use, won't compare him with anyone else. It didn't feel great, he wasn't liked. Retrospectively, I suppose you have to argue that he sort of held it together. I don't know if by luck or design or some very, very clever manoeuvring on the part of the Arts Council. We had Bazalgette and we had.... Who was the previous Chief Exec before Darren Henley

JM: Alan Davey.

MH: Yeah. Alan Davey was a good operator actually. He was a good political operator. So, I think that team worked well in those political circles.

JM: Yeah, there is that sense of.... For a non-political body, there is a sense of many political appointments to it. When Gerry Robinson came in in 1997-98 there was very much a sense that he was Blair's man and then with Liz Forgan being appointed in 2009, it reads in places like a rear-guard action. So that Labour knew that, if not going out, they'd be in a struggle so they put somebody in who's on their side.

MH: I hadn't really thought about it with Liz Forgan because she was so good. Just thought she was a great arts advocate. I didn't really think at that point what it meant politically. But I think you're possibly right. I mean, certainly, Bazalgette was seen as a government appointment so I'm sure

there's something in what you say. The current, now I don't know, I don't know what the thinking is other than it's a really good appointment to have Nick Serota in. You never really know, you know? You hear chatter but you never really know. There was no question that Bazalgette was engineered.

JM: The man selected for the task. Alright, good. So, finally then I was just wondering if you had any more general thoughts on either your experiences there or what you.... A question I always think about is, if you had unlimited money or unlimited opportunities, what would be the one thing that you'd fix or do differently.

MH: I'll go back to my point about boards. I don't think that's ever been addressed. Probably because it's a very challenging one to address. Companies need boards in order to be, you know, charities and whatever. And it's very hard to get good board members and a good range of board members and yet, smaller more fleet footed companies may have easier boards and boards that are more flexible but I've sat on so many.... I was an observer on all fifteen of those arts organisations in the Yorkshire region, attending board meetings left, right and centre, and I'm still on boards and obviously I've serviced boards in my roles as Exec Director. And I think they're a problem. We've never cracked that governance issue around.... There are lots of documents about good governance but, in practice, where I've seen bad practice it's so often goes back to bad governance. SO that would be my observation I suppose.

JM: Yeah, so it's an administrative issue then, rather than a funding or a values issue, it's the structural question?

MH: I think that's a factor. I think it's a factor. I think so. The only other thing is, it's not about money, of course we all need more money, the other thing is it's just too bureaucratic. The funding system is too bureaucratic. If I quantified the amount of time I spent at the moment, servicing the needs of stakeholders, particularly the Arts Council, and how I might use that time for the bettering of the organisation I work for, to find other monies and develop other strategies and plan ahead. I could probably have planned the next four years and written my NPO in a much more structured and credible way than I ended up doing [laughter]. There is so much and it seems to increase rather than decrease. And I don't know if that's because Arts Council staff are diminished and have less time so it just plays more and more into the hands of the portfolio. But it's getting to the point where it's a real obstacle to work. I actually can't do a lot of what I need to do. International strategy, classic example, we've got real international opportunities at this company but over the years, the Arts Council demands are so strong that that amongst all the other things I have to do administratively

JM: Gets lost

MH: Hmmm. I mean every five minutes there's a new major report that I have to write or.... Uh, yeah. Anyway, so a lot of it I think is structural, yes.

JM: Good stuff, yes. So, that's about.... that's me, unless there are any questions or queries you have at your end?

MH: What's your timeline for yourself, for drafting up?

JM: So, this is for a resubmission of a thesis that was originally submitted in September 2015. Long story short, had a rough result, needed to redraft a few things. This will be going in in August. What I've done over the redrafting period is.... I've had the framework of three or four big ideas which I thought were sound and then I've now been doing interviews, primary research to test those ideas out almost. The upshot of it is that I've generally been right or, at least, what I think is justifiable, but now rather than just theorising it I can actually demonstrate it.

MH: Right, okay.

JM: The submission is beginning of August this year so we're about two and a half months out. So, I'm just redrafting, going over arguments, shaping them, getting the structure right and then folding in insights from interviews and archival work and those sorts of things.

MH: That's a lot of work, ploughing through audio, picking out your key points.

JM: It's okay, oddly relaxing in a sense that, when you're typing it up anyway, you don't have to think. It's almost, just there. It's something I tend to do in the evening or when I've got nothing else, no heavy brain work on. But then, going through it again and figuring out what people mean what they say things.

MH: Yeah. By all means if anything's unclear when you're transcribing you're welcome to ping me an email and ask, "what on earth did you mean by that".

JM: Thank you. What I've done in the past is sent marked transcripts over with any kind of questions marked on them. Generally, people have been fairly good, there's just been a few instances of, and thinking back there was nothing in there, but a few instances where you could read things one way but it might not be quite right. But I shall let you know. Where are we now? It's Monday, likely as not I'll get this typed up by the end of the week and send something over then.

MH: Great

JM: But otherwise, thank you ever so much it was

MH: Not at all

JM: It was really, really helpful and I'll keep you posted

MH: Okay Joe, thanks for that

JM: Thanks ever so much, you have a good afternoon Mark

MH: And you, I'll speak to you later

JM: Bye bye now